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OR,

The Destroyer Destroyed.

A Romance of the Gulf.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

THE SLAVE-SHIP.

UPON a tempest-swept sea a dismasted vessel was adrift, while the rude waves dashed over her, sweeping her decks clean.

Her masts had been torn off by the fury of the gale that had struck her, the spars and rigging had gone with them, the bowsprit was gone and the bulwarks stove in here and there.

Not a human being was visible upon her decks, yet from below came the sound of many voices, some in apparent entreaty, others groaning in anguish and still more raised in angry denunciation.

Yet the voices were strange and the tongue spoken was unknown, for it was a mysterious

"BRAVO, JACK!" CRIED THE RED SKIN SAILING MASTER. "MAY GOD PRESERVE HIM!"
ADDED THE LADY, FERVENTLY.

language seldom heard except by those who visited the wilds of Africa.

The hatches were open, also the companion-way, and now and then a wave more furious than others would cast tons of water down into the cabin and hold, causing a louder outcry from below.

Afar off was visible a vessel driving along under storm-sails, and though the wreck lay in her course it was evident that those on board had not yet sighted the drifting hull.

The vessel was a stanchly built craft, such as were used as freighters in the Gulf many years ago.

She was well fitted up, however, looked comfortable and had passengers on board.

Her crew were blacks, and a dozen in number, all dressed in a neat sailor garb.

Those knowing the vessels along the coast would have set this one down as a plantation lugger.

Aft, apparently enjoying the rough sea, and the speed with which the craft was driving along, were three persons.

One of these was a boy of about nine years of age, a handsome, dashing little fellow, attired in sailor costume, and who had an expression upon his face of boyish delight in his surroundings.

Another was a negress, wearing a red handkerchief turban upon her head, and keeping her eyes upon every movement of the boy, her little charge.

The third person was a woman of rare loveliness of face and form.

She was clad in deep black, wore a heavy veil, now drawn aside, and thus revealing a very beautiful countenance, though one wearing the stamp of sorrow.

It was a face with a haunting memory of the past ever resting upon it.

The resemblance of the little sailor boy to her showed that the relationship between them was that of mother and son, for he had the same glorious eyes, the same look about the mouth that rested upon his mother's.

She was attired in deep black, to which large gems in her ears, at her throat, and upon her shapely hands were in strange contrast, for they were rubies of great size and value, and the only ornaments she wore.

Aloft was a negro lookout, and he sat upon his perch, little heeding the plunging of the vessel as she drove along at a twelve-knot pace.

He had a keen eye, and kept a bright lookout, for the craft was unarmed, and the Gulf waters were infested with pirates in those days, to which the lugger would doubtless prove a most valuable prize.

"Sail ho!"

The cry came from the black lookout aloft, and all eyes glanced upward, while the little boy's shrill voice was heard piping:

"Whereaway?"

"Dead ahead, little master," came the reply.

"What do you make of her, Belt, for I do not see her?"

The question came now from the lady in black.

"It's a wreck, lady, and directly in our course."

"Ay, ay! my glass has found her now," and the lady had her sea-glass turned upon the wreck.

"It has been a vessel badly used in the storm, Reginald," she said, addressing the boy, who at once took the glass and ascended to the rigging without the slightest dread of the danger from the pitching vessel.

"It is a wreck, and in bad shape, mother," he called down. "Its decks are swept clean, for I do not see a living being on board," he continued.

"We will run as close as we dare, Reginald, and discover if she is deserted, for if not we may rescue some unfortunates, if we lay by until the gale blows over."

The lugger was driving along so swiftly that it was not very long before all eyes were upon the wreck, now plainly seen from the decks.

Ten minutes more and the lugger glided to leeward, and luffing sharp, lay to, while the sailing-master hailed:

"Wreck ho!"

As his voice was heard there came from the wreck a perfect howl in apparently hundreds of voices, heard plainly above the howling of the winds and wash of the waves.

The woman turned pale at this unexpected answer to the hail, the boy looked amazed, and the black crew fairly cringed with fear.

Had it been in the darkness of night no power could have held the black crew of the lugger from instant flight.

"What does it mean?" asked the woman, though she expected no answer to her question.

No one replied, for no one knew. All were silent, and suddenly the sounds from the wreck died away, and a stillness alone settled there.

The craft was seen to be settling slowly, as though from a leak, or the dashing spray from the boarding waves.

The hull was long, narrow, and of trim build, as though the craft had been built for fast sailing and weatherly qualities.

This was all that could be seen, for, as has been said, her decks were swept clean.

After a silence of a minute or more the sounds of wailing, and voices in pleading and rage were again heard.

All looked at each other on board the lugger, and wondered.

Then from forward came one of the black crew—a man of fifty, with a strangely marked face, and when he spoke it was with a peculiar accent.

"Missus, Jocko know all about him," he said.

"About the wreck, Jocko, you mean?" the woman asked, for he had addressed her.

"Yes, missus."

"What does it all mean, Jocko, for just hear those groans and cries?"

"Jocko know, missus, for Jocko was once in ship like that—come from Congo River when he was stolen from his people. Jocko know their cries, missus, and hears voices he believed dead to him forever."

"Ah! your words explain to me now, Jocko, that it is a slaver," cried the woman eagerly.

"Yes, missus, it a slave ship—Jocko know," was the answer of the old African sailor.

CHAPTER II.

THE BLACK SWIMMER.

THE explanation given by Jocko, of what the howling on the wreck meant, seemed satisfactory to the woman, and over her face a strange expression came as she turned her eyes upon the plunging, rolling hull.

"It would be madness now, Belt, to attempt to board her in this sea," said the lady, turning to the man who had come down from aloft and who was the sailing-master of the lugger.

"Yes, lady, it would cost the lives of the boat's crew for the sea is very wild," was the answer of Belt, who was a tall, finely formed man whose darkly bronzed complexion showed a mixture of Indian and negro blood, and who possessed a bright, intelligent, fearless face.

"Yet we must not desert them, Belt," and the woman spoke with considerable anxiety in her tone and look.

"No, lady, we can lay by until the sea runs down."

"We are in a dangerous locality, Belt."

"True, lady, but I saw no sail in sight, and the wind is not so strong as it was."

"I see no one on board. Can all of her white crew have been swept into the sea?"

"It would be but just punishment for their crime of stealing human beings to bring them into slavery, lady," was the quick reply of the Indian sailing-master.

His words caused the woman to start; but for a moment she was silent and then said slowly, as though feeling her way:

"It was their destiny, and I hope that it will be ours to save them. If we do, then I shall care for them most faithfully, Belt."

"With such a mistress, lady, as you are, they would be more content in slavery," answered the Indian captain.

The woman's face brightened at this, and she replied:

"Well, Belt, we must risk our safety to lie by and save them. Just hearken to their cries!"

The sounds from the wreck increased now in volume and Jocko again came forward.

"Missus, if Captain Belt run to windward of wreck, Jocko jump into sea and swim down to it, then he get on board and tell his people they will be saved."

"In this wild sea, Jocko, it would be madness," answered the woman, though she knew that the African was noted as a wonderful swimmer.

"Jocko all right in any sea, missus. If he can't get on wreck, then Captain Belt run lugger to leeward and pick Jocko up."

"You can do this, Belt?"

"Oh yes, lady."

"What do you think of Jocko's going in so wild a sea?"

"Jocko is a fish, lady."

"And you wish to make the trial, Jocko?"

"Yes, missus."

"What do you say, Reginald?" and the woman turned to her son.

"Jocko does swim like a fish, mother, and those people howl terribly."

"Yes, and he could calm them."

"Yes, Jocko know how to keep them quiet, missus."

"Very well; you can make the trial, Jocko; but raise your hand for aid if you feel you cannot make the swim in safety and Belt will stand ready to run down and pick you up."

"Yes, missus, but Jocko all right."

The lugger was now gotten under way and beat up to windward of the wreck.

When reaching a position that placed the wreck dead to leeward and an eighth of a mile away, the lugger was brought-to and Jocko made a leap over into the storm-raked sea.

The waves were running very high and fiercely, and he went surging along at a terrific pace.

Now and then he would disappear from sight wholly, and all on the lugger feared he had either been beaten down beneath the fierce waters, or had been attacked by a shark.

"Brave Jocko!" cried the red-skin sailing-master.

"May God preserve him!" added the lady fervently.

The keen eyes of the boy, Reginald, who was now clinging in the rigging, sighted the daring swimmer each time after he was supposed to be lost, and after awhile Jocko was discovered to be near the wreck.

There was rigging hanging over the bows to leeward, as had been seen by all, and this Jocko hoped to seize as he went driving by.

The lugger was now put under way again to run down to leeward of the wreck and there lie to, while all eyes were strained to catch a glimpse of the black swimmer.

"He is close upon the wreck," cried little Reginald, who kept sight of the African, his piercing eyes following his course through the wild waters.

"He has rounded the bows to leeward!" he again called out, and, a moment after, all eyes beheld the bold black swimmer's form appear over the bulwarks of the wreck and leap in safety to the deck.

A wild cry of admiration and delight broke from the negro crew of the lugger at this sight, and Reginald's shrill voice arose above them all, while even his sad-faced mother and the negress cheered.

The dark form glided along the decks of the wreck as the lugger went tearing by, and then Jocko suddenly disappeared in the cabin.

A minute or more he was there, but as the lugger swept up into the wind and lay to, Jocko was seen to reappear on the deck.

He waved his hands toward the lugger, but what the signal meant, even Belt could not interpret.

He was seen to walk slowly toward the open hatchway amidships.

The sounds of wailing and cries in men's voices and women's came to the ears of those on the lugger, and all awaited breathlessly the result of Jocko's presence being known on board.

Suddenly the sounds ceased and silence followed, while Jocko was seen to disappear down the hatchway.

Long waited those on the lugger for his reappearance; but he did not appear, nor did the sounds of voices again arise.

Belt went aloft again to cast a close look over the seas, and hailed the deck with the report that no sail was in sight.

Night was coming on and still the gale continued, and all felt anxious about the wreck and its occupants.

But, just as darkness fell upon the sea, Jocko was seen to come forth from the hold, and soon after a bright light gleamed out over the waters like a beacon of hope.

CHAPTER III.

THE RESCUE FROM DEATH.

"THAT is a wise precaution upon the part of Jocko, to set that light," said the woman, as the rays of the lantern gleamed out over the darkened waters.

"Yes, lady, we can keep the wreck in sight now through the night," responded Belt.

"But may she not go down, Belt, for she appeared to be settling?" the woman asked.

"It is possible, lady, as she is doubtless leaking, though I hope she will float until morning, for if the gale blows itself out we can soon after lower a boat and go to the rescue."

"As it is, should she sink, all on board would perish, for they always keep their human freight below in irons, these slavers do."

"Yes, such is the case, and that is why we saw none of them upon deck."

"And they owe it to this also, lady, that they are not at the bottom of the sea, for the decks were swept clean of the slaver's crew beyond all doubt."

"Yes, or Jocko would have met some one of the crew; as it is, Belt, there appears to be not a soul on board free of irons."

"So it seems, lady: but see, the gale is growing less violent."

This fact soon became evident, and those on the lugger eagerly watched for the going down of wind and wave.

Yet it was several hours before the winds sunk into a fair breeze and as much longer ere Belt considered it safe to lower a boat and board the wreck, the light of which was still visible though some distance away.

The lugger was again put on her course and run down as near the wreck as it was safe to go, and then Belt called away a boat with four oarsmen.

"I wish you to hail first, Belt," said the woman.

Jocko had not made any signal as yet, and the sounds of voices on board had not been heard, so that Belt felt that the advice to hail was good and did so.

"Ahoy the wreck!" he called out in his clear voice.

Quickly came the answer:

"All right, Captain Belt!"

"It is Jocko's voice, so I will board in the boat," the woman announced.

"You, lady?"

"Yes."

"But the danger, lady!"

"I do not fear to take the risk, for the sea is not so wild now."

"But the sight you will see there, lady!"

"I care not for that, Belt, so will go."

Belt said no more and the woman took her place in the boat and seized the tiller-ropes. She appeared to have no fear, and also showed that she knew what she was about in taking the helm.

Away pulled the boat, urged by four black oarsmen, and in a short while it ran under the lee of the wreck.

"You, missus?" cried Jocko, in astonishment, as the woman boarded the wreck.

"Yes, Jocko, for I wished to see how I could serve these poor people. It is a slave-ship, is it not?"

"Oh, yes, missus, and many of my own blood are here."

"Indeed! I am glad of this, for your own sake, Jocko, and they shall be well-cared for."

"I told them that, missus, and how good you were to your black people, as Jocko well knows."

"But, where is the crew of the craft, Jocko?"

"All dead!" was the rejoinder of the African, uttered in a tone that was almost savage.

"They were on deck, missus, all but the slaves, when the tornado struck them, and the vessel was thrown upon her beam-ends and all swept away with the masts and rigging."

"The hull righted, but not a soul came down below after the tornado struck the craft, and my people felt that all had been punished as they deserved."

"When Jocko appeared to them, missus, they thought I was an evil spirit and crouched in fear, but I soon told them my story, and they were happy to see Jocko, for they had believed me dead."

"Will you come now, missus, and see the people, for the day is breaking, you see," and Jocko pointed out over the waters, now becoming gray under the coming light of day.

"I will wait until it is lighter, for I wish to see them as they are."

"You will see only misery and horrors, missus, a sight your eyes should not look upon."

"I wish to see them as they are in their suffering, Jocko; but, why have you not freed them?"

"Jocko never thought of that," was the reply, and the woman quickly entered the cabin.

The place was small and cramped, while all was confusion within.

The wreck was settling steadily, that was certain, for the swish and shock of waters rushing about in the hold with the movements of the hull could be distinctly heard.

Glancing quickly about the cabin the woman took here and there certain things she appeared to fancy, and at last came upon what she was looking for, a large bunch of keys.

"These will unlock their irons, Jocko."

"Oh, missus, they will be so glad, so happy! and Jocko is happy too!" cried the African.

It was now broad daylight and the woman felt that she could see down in the hold; so, keys in hand, she left the cabin and made her way to the hatchway amidships.

"How many are on board, Jocko?" she asked, hesitating ere she went down the hatchway.

"Three hundred, missus."

"So many?"

"Oh, missus, there were six hundred at first, but just half have died upon the voyage, and there are dead there now, missus, still lying in their chains."

"My God! this is horrible."

"Too horrible for your eyes to see, missus."

"No, I will not shrink from it, so lead the way, Jocko, and tell them that I am here to save them—that they are to be my people now, and be kindly cared for."

Jocko obeyed, and down into the hold of the slave ship went the beautiful woman to face a scene of horror she had never dreamed of before.

CHAPTER IV.

A MYSTERIOUS WOMAN.

THE scene that met the eyes of the adventurous woman beggars description, for there in the hold of the slave-ship were three hundred human beings in chains, men women and children.

And more there were also in irons, but they were dead, and some had been freed from all earthly pain, and suffering of heart and brain for many long hours.

Half stunned they looked, and half dead, while they were but scantily clothed, and as they sat in long rows were chained to the decks beyond all possibility of escape.

Without food or water for some two days they had been kindly cared for by Jocko the moment he was on board and made himself known to them. He had, indeed, passed the whole night in carrying water and food to the suffering creatures.

In a few words in their native tongue, which came slowly from his lips after long years since he had spoken it, Jocko told them that the good

lady had come to their rescue, and quickly she began the work of freeing them.

"You, Jocko, go and see if there is a leak below, or if the water has only come in from the boarding waves. Do this while I am unlocking their manacles," she ordered, seeming to show no fear of the wild-looking beings, or dread of her loathsome surroundings.

Jocko hastened away and one by one the captives were set free and sent on deck where they gave vent to their joy in wild yells, as they breathed in the fresh air and beheld once more the bright sunshine.

Some were too weak to walk, so were borne on deck, until at last not one remained below in the loathsome pen but the dead.

Jocko had discovered that the vessel did not leak to any great extent and so reported to the beautiful woman, who, oppressed by the fetid air and her surroundings, at last staggered on deck, when, as she appeared, she beheld a sight that thrilled her with a strange emotion, for down upon their faces, flat and abject as idol-worshippers, went every one of the freed beings, groveling at her feet, while they uttered words which she could not understand.

And there, too, also on his face, was Jocko, quickly doing what his people did in their abject gratitude to one whom they deemed to be almost of another world.

"Bid them rise, Jocko, for I am not one to be worshiped, and then explain to the strongest men among them that the pumps must be worked to free the wreck of water, while the dead must be brought out and thrown overboard at once."

"Then I will signal Belt to take the wreck in tow for the lugger could never carry half of them."

Jocko interpreted what the woman said and quickly and cheerfully her orders were obeyed.

Thus hours passed, but at last the wreck had been cleared of the water, the dead had been thrown into the sea, along with the iron chains and manacles, and the lugger had cables out and was slowly towing the slave-ship toward a haven on the coast, the fair mistress of the craft having returned on board her vessel and ordered Belt to head for Mobile Bay.

The sharp bows and narrow hull of the slaver made her tow easily, so the lugger forged ahead in fair time, for the sea was not rough and a favoring wind was blowing.

"That is a beautiful vessel, Belt," remarked the woman, who had been admiring the slaver as she surged along astern of the lugger.

"Yes, lady, she certainly was a very fleet sailer, and a stanch craft as well, so must have been caught at a disadvantage to have been so wrecked by the storm," answered Belt.

"That must have been the case, though Jocko seemed to understand that there had been a mutiny of the crew on board and the men had broken into the spirit-room and gotten drunk."

"That must have been the case, lady, and the storm struck the ship when all hands were unprepared and thus swept the decks."

"But the hull is in good repair now, lady, and she will make a fine prize."

"I shall so consider her, Belt, and I know where she can find a hiding-place for the present."

"Then you will not take her up to Mobile with you, lady?"

A strange look came over the face of the woman and she was silent for some minutes, as though doubtful how to reply.

At last she said:

"Belt, you were never a slave, I believe?"

"No, lady, my mother was an Indian woman, and I was born among her tribe, though my father was an Octoroon, so I have merely a trace of negro blood in my veins."

"Well, I feel sure that I can trust you, Belt."

"Under all circumstances, lady," assured the sailing-master, with decision.

"When I secured your services with this lugger I told you I wished to go to Mobile."

"Yes, lady."

"I intimated that I intended to seek a home there with my son, and my slaves."

"You did, lady."

"Now these people, my crew of slaves, I have owned but a short while, purchasing them from time to time, and it is my intention to seek a home for myself and them. But, Belt, I shall not now go to Mobile."

"Where then, lady?"

"I shall seek no seaport."

"Ah, lady?" in evident surprise.

"I have a spot in view which I can pilot the lugger to, for I know these waters well; but first, I wish to find a haven for the slave-ship, where she will be in a perfectly safe hiding-place."

"I know of such places about Barrataria, lady."

"I know of a lagoon much nearer—one that is entered by an inlet some seven leagues from the entrance to Mobile Bay. It is deep enough for the slaver to run in at high tide, and once there no one would find her, I am sure."

"And the people, lady?"

"I will take them to my home, Belt, for they are my slaves now," was the firm response of the woman.

CHAPTER V.

THE FLIGHT.

It was early in the morning when land was sighted, from the foretop of the lugger, and Belt reported it to be the high point upon which now stands Fort Morgan, and which forms the right shore of the pass into Mobile Bay.

The fair mistress of the craft was awakened by Linda, the negress, at Belt's order, and told that land was in sight and just what it was.

To his surprise the order came to Belt to put about and keep just out of sight of the coast.

Then Linda came on deck and asked if there was any sail in sight.

"Say to the lady that there is a sail far to the northward, but it is too distant to decide whether it is a coaster, cruiser or pirate."

Soon after the woman came on deck, and cast a quick glance about her.

The land was still in sight, though Belt had put the lugger about, and was running off-shore again, the slaver towing astern as before.

"That is the entrance to Mobile Bay, you say, Belt?"

"Yes, lady."

"And where is the sail you spoke of?"

"Just there, lady; you see her now?"

"Yes, and I do not want her to see us."

"You think her dangerous, lady?"

"She may be a cruiser."

"Then as such she would do us no harm."

"I have no desire to be seen by a cruiser, any more than by a pirate; so keep the land just in view and stand along the coast until noon, when you can head for it."

"There will be no haven there, lady, unless you mean Pensacola."

"I do not mean Pensacola, but will find a haven—the lagoon of which I spoke."

Belt bowed, but made no reply.

Soon after, little Reginald came on deck and went through his daily exercise of going aloft and inspecting the crew and lugger, an amusement for him, which the blacks seemed also to enjoy.

As the lugger ran along the coast, it was seen that the sail discerned afar off was coming on rapidly, and evidently heading on the same course with them.

This was significant, and indicated, in the mind of the woman, that they had been seen, and were now being pursued.

If so, then the strange sail was either a cruiser or a pirate, for certainly a coaster would not give chase to the lugger.

"She may be heading for Mobile Bay, lady," suggested Belt, after taking a long look at her with his glass.

"No; for were she laying her course for the bay, with the wind where it now is, she would be pointing a dozen points to leeward of the way she is now doing," and the woman spoke as one who fully understood sea life.

"I think you are right, lady; but she is gaining, so what is to be done?"

"I shall run into the lagoon with the slave-ship, and find a hiding-place."

"It lies just here, so square away at once for the land, for now we cannot be seen from the pass."

"She may follow us into the lagoon, lady."

"In that case she will find nothing more than the deserted lugger, for they cannot see that we have the slave-ship in tow at this distance, and I will hide her in one place and our craft in another, and the people can march inland with the freight."

"But, my craft will be taken by them, or set on fire, lady, and I am a poor man."

"I will pay you the amount of her value, if she is injured or burned."

With this assurance Belt seemed satisfied, and so all sail was at once crowded upon the lugger, and she headed landward.

The woman watched the shores eagerly, as though looking for some familiar point, and at last exclaimed:

"Yes, there it is."

"What is it, lady?"

"Do you see yonder tall pine towering above the forest?"

"Yes, lady."

"Well, head directly for it, as the inlet is there, and as we run in I will give you another landmark to steer by."

The wind freshened a little now, and as the lugger was going directly before it, she set her huge sails and pressed in with all her speed.

Astern of her came the slave-ship, towing very lightly, and the land rose rapidly before her advance.

But, afar down the coast the strange vessel was rising with great rapidity, and now it could be seen that she was not only in chase but was an armed brig as well.

It was a large hull, and was covered with canvas as she crowded on in chase.

After watching the stranger for awhile most attentively, the woman turned her gaze upon the land, now but a couple of leagues away.

"Belt," she suddenly called out.

"Yes, lady," and Belt came quickly to her side.

"That craft will be near enough to see us run into the inlet, and with a high tide can follow us

if she takes big chances of being wrecked, and that I do not wish."

"No, lady."

"I do not care to have the lugger found and destroyed, nor the slave-ship discovered, either, for that will mean the loss of both of them."

"Yes, lady, but the cruiser will certainly pursue us into the inlet."

"In their boats, yes, for I hardly believe they would venture to run in with the brig."

"The American captains are bold men, lady, and they evidently take us for a pirate on board yonder brig."

"That is why I must not be taken, for I am determined that the slaves shall not be set free, nor shall this lugger be overhauled and searched."

"What is to be done, then, lady?"

"Head off again with all speed, laying the course for Pensacola, and when night comes in we can double on him by running close inshore and thus back to the inlet."

"But we cannot run into the inlet by night, lady, if we do give the brig the slip."

"I can run into that inlet on the darkest night I ever saw," was the firm rejoinder of the woman, and her words caused Belt to regard her with increased interest and admiration, for she was becoming more and more a mystery to the Indian sailing-master of the lugger.

CHAPTER VI.

A FAIR PILOT.

THE lugger's course was accordingly changed again, and her course lay as though she was going to Pensacola.

It was hoped that the cruiser, which was now in chase beyond all doubt, when seeing her head for port would suppose she was an honest craft and thus give up the chase.

By calculating well, the lady captain of the lugger hoped to be still over two leagues ahead of the brig at nightfall, and then in the darkness, for the sky was overcast with clouds, she trusted that they could double on their course and give the stranger the slip.

That she had calculated well was proven by the fact that the cruiser was just two leagues astern when night came on.

She was running along, too, like a race-horse, with all her canvas drawing and there was a look about her that meant business and no mistake.

Before the lugger, with the slave-ship in tow, could reach Pensacola, the cruiser would surely come up with her.

By casting loose the slave-ship, for the brig to pick up, the lugger could escape beyond all doubt in the darkness; but the woman was determined not to give up the slave-ship, come what might, and so she told Belt.

Jocko the African was in charge of the slave-ship, where he could tell the blacks of the outcome of the flight of the lugger, and he had orders from his mistress to make known to them that the strange sail was a pirate who would put them all to death, so that they would do all in their power to prevent falling into their hands.

No sooner had darkness fallen upon the sea when lights were ordered set upon the lugger, and the woman then commanded Belt to step a mast in the long yawl of the lugger, and place across the top of it a long yard.

Upon the ends of the yard were placed lanterns, which would look like the lights of a ship.

Then the yawl was lowered into the sea, with a long cable attached to a small anchor, and as the lugger sped on, out went her lights, while those on the yawl looked exactly as the woman intend they should, like a vessel.

The slave-ship cleared the yawl by putting the helm hard down, and instantly the lugger flew away before the wind toward the coast, leaving the yawl dead astern.

A run of a mile on this course, and she headed back the way she had come, edging all the time nearer and nearer to the coast, from which she was now distant hardly more than a mile.

"Keep a bright watch, Belt, for the cruiser's lights," said the woman, and every eye was strained seaward.

It was not very long before the lights were sighted, the woman catching the first glance of them, and they were some two miles or more to leeward.

"There she is, Belt, running straight for the yawl's lights, so we are safe."

"Yes, lady, and it was a clever ruse you played to save the lugger."

"It was successful, hence clever, Belt; but the cruiser has yet half a league to sail to reach the yawl and discover the cheat, and that will give us all of four miles start of him, even if he should put back in our wake, which he will do, so we can rush on now for the inlet without fear, I think."

"So I believe, lady; but will you dare run in by night, for it is growing very dark and the wind is rising?"

"Yes, I observed that some time ago; but I shall go in if it blows a gale," was the reply.

Belt was uneasy, for he had not supposed the woman to be a sailor, as he had discovered her to be since the picking up of the slave-ship.

She had chartered his lugger with its crew of six blacks, and had come on board with two dozen slaves, her son and a quantity of household furniture.

Then she had told him to head for Mobile Bay, and dropping down the Mississippi from New Orleans, the port he had sailed from, he had obeyed her orders.

They were caught in a storm the first night out, and the lugger weathered it well, though blown many leagues off her course.

Then the wreck of the slave-ship was sighted, and since then Belt had become more and more convinced that he had a very remarkable and mysterious lady passenger on board, a woman whose command he dared not disobey.

Several hours after the ruse of the yawl with its lights, the Lady Captain gave orders to head inshore.

"It is dangerous, lady," said Belt.

"Take soundings and then do as I order you," she said.

The lead was thrown, and the woman seemed to understand just where they were, for she said quickly:

"Just as I supposed; we are on the bar off the lagoon."

"I knew as much from the action of the sea."

"Now, Belt, I will take the wheel."

"You, lady?"

"Yes."

"But, lady, it is too much of a task for you, and—"

"I will take the wheel, Belt," and with this she stepped to the wheel, and at once headed the lugger directly for the shore.

The wind had increased to almost half a gale, and the sea was running higher and higher under its influence.

The slave-ship was tugging hard at her tow-lines, and the sail carried by the lugger was driving her along at a terrible pace.

But the woman held on steadily, though all was darkness ahead, while Belt stood by her side, gazing through his glass dead ahead.

"Do you sight anything yet, Belt?" she asked, coolly, from time to time, and each time came the same reply:

"Nothing, lady."

"Take the wheel and hold her as she is, while I go forward with my glass."

He obeyed, and the Lady Captain soon stood on the bows, gazing steadily ahead on their course.

"Ah! there is the inlet dead ahead."

"I knew I was right," she said, and returning to the wheel she again took it with the remark:

"I was not wrong, for the land is not half a mile away, and we are pointing straight into the inlet."

"You know this coast well, lady," ventured Belt.

"I have had reason to know it well," was the reply and the tone was harsh and bitter.

The man said no more and soon after even in the darkness a pathway of foam was visible before them, and straight along this the lugger was driving, while at the wheel was a woman as pilot.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LUGGER SETS SAIL.

THE crew of the lugger were never more anxious than was their half-breed Indian captain, when they saw that a woman held their lives in her hands.

Yet not one of them dared utter a remonstrance, for if the fair pilot had awed their commander they felt in still greater awe of her.

They watched her with eager eyes, and when at last she gave orders in a sharp, peremptory tone to lower all canvas but the mainsail and jib, they sprang to their posts and obeyed with alacrity.

Then they could see through the darkness the black line of land looming up upon either bow of the lugger, while straight ahead was that pathway of foam which the vessel was following and dragging the slave ship after her.

Soon the land was upon either bow, and then the lugger rushed into the foaming inlet through which the waters were surging with terrific force driven by the wind, sea and incoming tide.

But the lugger stood the battle bravely and though at times the slave-ship was almost buried from sight beneath the following waves, she too came on the taut bowlines showing that they had not parted under the strain.

There was one bend in the inlet, but around this the lugger and her tow swept swiftly, and soon after went out upon the broad bosom of the lagoon.

"Lady, that was a marvelous feat for you to accomplish in darkness like this," said Belt, as he saw that the lugger and slave-ship were safe.

The woman made no reply to his words of praise, but at once changed the course of the lugger, jibing the sails to port and heading up the lagoon, while at the same time she bore away for the other shore.

A run of half an hour under shortened sail and still acting as pilot, the woman ran the lugger straight in toward what appeared to be a wall of rock.

But instead it was a foliage-clad bank, the

trees towering high and at last opening where a sluggish stream penetrated inland.

Into this the lugger glided, the crew taking in sail as she did so.

Then a couple of boats were lowered and gotten out ahead, and the lugger and slave ship were slowly turned further up the stream, aided by the tide also.

When at last the anchors were let fall the two vessels were in a spot so dense from the overhanging foliage that the darkness of death seemed resting there.

The crew could positively not see each other a yard distant upon the deck of the lugger.

"We are safe now, Belt, and the crew can all turn in, for they need rest."

With this the woman went into the cabin and sought the rest she sadly needed herself.

When she awoke the sun was shining and the roar of the surf on the beach beyond the lagoon came to her ears.

But she also heard the chirp of insects, the singing of birds and the voices of the crew on deck, broken in upon by the merry laughter of her little son, who had crept out of the cabin so as not to awaken his mother.

"Going on deck she found the lugger anchored in a stream and almost hidden with overhanging branches hung heavily with Spanish moss."

The slave-ship lay a couple of lengths below, and the crew and the released captives were all busy fishing, and most successful indeed in securing a breakfast from the waters.

"Well, Belt, what do you think of this for a hiding-place?" she asked, after having cast a look about her as though recalling scenes well-known to her, though which she had been absent from for some time.

"It is a perfect retreat, lady."

"Well, here we can leave the people, and the wreck, until I wish to send for them."

"Yes, lady, but the lugger?"

"Send a boat out into the lagoon to see if the cruiser or any other sail is in sight."

"Yes, lady."

"If not, let the boat land on the Gulf shore of the lagoon, and keep watch until late in the afternoon, and then return."

"I understand, lady."

"Then, if the cruiser, or no other sail is in sight, I will set sail."

Belt gave the instructions to the three men who went in the boat to reconnoiter, and they were soon out of sight down the stream.

It was just sunset when they returned and reported that the cruiser had been off the inlet when they had reached the sand dunes on the Gulf shore, but she had held on slowly down the coast and disappeared in the distance.

The woman then sent for Jocko and made known to him that he was to remain on the wreck with the slaves, until her return.

Not a soul was to be allowed ashore, and all were to have food in plenty, and soon should have a happy home, and this he was to explain to his people.

"They will be happy with you, missus, for they think you are an angel, and knew that you saved them from death last night," said Jocko.

"An angel they think me?" was the bitter response.

"Well, let them so think if they will, for it suits my humor to have it so."

Soon after the lugger got up anchor, her boats towed her down past the slave-ship, and the eager, savage crowd watched her as she went slowly by, and when they beheld the woman standing at the wheel, dropped upon their faces to the deck in abject worship of her as a living idol.

She smiled in a strange way, and placed one hand upon the head of her little boy who stood by her side, while she waved the other toward them.

Then the lugger had passed on, and entering the lagoon, set sail and headed for the other shore, and out of the inlet.

The run was made easily by day, and in a fair breeze, and soon the lugger reached the open Gulf, just as darkness came on.

Up the coast she ran, rounded the point into the pass, and sped on up Mobile Bay under cover of darkness, though her destination was not the seaport of Mobile, as Belt was again surprised to discover.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DESERTED HOME.

AFTER entering Mobile Bay, instead of running toward the city, the lugger held on almost due north, hugging the eastern shore.

Bon Lecour Bay was left to starboard and with a stiff breeze the craft, under the pilotage of the woman who guided its destinies, glided on up the coast.

Point Clear was given a wide berth on account of bars, the woman showing that she knew the waters well.

Having passed Point Clear, then a French and Spanish settlement, the lugger ran closer in and held on toward a high range of cliffs which overhung the waters of the bay, extending on up toward old Spanish Fort.

Close in toward these cliffs the lugger ran and anchored almost beneath their shadow, just off the mouth of a small stream.

The scenery was wild in the extreme and no twinkling lights ashore showed that the spot was inhabited.

A boat was lowered and with two black oarsmen the woman rowed ashore, landing on the left bank of the creek, and steering the boat herself to an old wharf unerringly in spite of the darkness.

"Await me here," she said to the two negro oarsmen, and she stepped ashore and disappeared in the gloom of the dense forest that crossed the shores at that point.

A weed-grown and neglected roadway led from the little wharf, which was also crumbling to decay, up the hillside, and taking it, after a walk of a quarter of a mile the woman came out upon the summit of the cliffs.

Far away to the northwest glimmered the lights of the seaport of Mobile, six leagues away, and before her to the westward and far to the southwest stretched Mobile Bay, its waters fanned by a pleasant breeze.

Below her, three hundred feet, the waves broke upon a mossy beach the outline of which could be followed with the eye in spite of the darkness.

Along the ridge of the cliff it was open, with here and there a live oak, magnolia or tall pine tree, but back a few paces the range sloped away and became a dense forest.

For a few minutes the woman stood there on the cliff, her hands clasped, her eyes drinking in the lovely scene, so quiet, so deathly still, but for the moaning of the tiny surf breaking upon the beach.

There lay the lugger at anchor, and with no light visible on board, her sails yet spread as though for instant flight.

Having stood there for some minutes, in deep and seemingly painful reverie, the woman turned and walked away up the cliff, following the weed-grown pathway.

A walk of a couple of hundred yards brought her to a house, hidden amid evergreens and the densest of foliage.

Vines, flowers and ornamental trees fairly hid the house from view; but the woman passed in through the tumble-down gateway, and stepped upon the piazza, which gave beneath her weight, showing that decay was upon it also.

Not a sound was heard, no glimmer of light, all darkness, desolation and quietude that was awe-inspiring.

Yet she seemed to feel no fear.

Deserted or not, the house held no terrors for her, or at least she did not shrink away appalled at the stillness and the thought that she was all alone.

A large owl, startled by her step, flew out from under the piazza roof with dismal cries at being disturbed, and his hoot was answered by the yelp of a wolf back in the forest.

The house was the ruin of what had once been a delightful abiding place, though now desolation, decay and desolation rested upon all.

The door swung open, creaking now and then with a wail as of a lost spirit, as the wind swept through the house.

Crossing the threshold into still deeper darkness the woman halted, and drawing from beneath her shawl a dark-lantern, she suddenly sent a gleam of light through the broad hallway.

There was a fluttering of bats, and startled chirping of birds that had made their nests there, but she did not flinch at their sound.

"This tells me that no one is here, that the spot, once so dear to me, is deserted, save by night-birds and reptiles, for see!" and she turned her light upon a huge snake that was crawling rapidly away from the glare and the human intruder.

"And this is still to be my home," she continued, musing aloud, and in a voice full of bitterness.

"It is peopled with the ghosts of mariners that can never die, that will haunt me to my grave, which God grant may be over in the valley yonder, where my parents now lie.

"Well, I have discovered what I would know, that the place is really deserted and shunned by every one, for men call it *haunted*."

"Bah! it is my life that is haunted, rather than this old house."

"But here I am to live, my noble boy and myself, and a metamorphosis shall come over all around us."

"Still, no one must know of my coming until I am in full possession, and then I care not, for here shall I reign as a queen over my people, the people I have saved from death in the sea."

"Now to give the signal to Belt to get the boats out and tow the lugger into the mouth of the creek, where she can be unloaded to-morrow, and put to sea to-morrow night, for those people are to be brought here, for here is to be their homes, as *my slaves*."

So saying she left the house, and going out upon the cliff, waved her lantern thrice around her head.

The signal was at once answered on board the lugger by showing a red light, for Belt was keeping close watch upon the cliff.

CHAPTER IX.

AMID HAUNTING MEMORIES.

HAVING seen her signal answered, the woman turned and started along the ridge path the way she had come.

But after going a few paces she halted, hesitated and turned back.

"I will return for awhile, for after to-night all will be changed there, and this is the last time that I will be alone in the old house."

So saying, she walked rapidly back to the house, and once more entered the hallway.

She took off the dark slides of the lantern, and a bright light shone about her.

The hallway was as it had been left years before by the former occupants of the place, save for the destroying marks of the finger of Time.

The furniture was still there, and several paintings hung upon the walls while two had fallen to the floor and the frames were broken.

A sitting-room was upon one side of the hall, a parlor upon the other, the carpets being moth-eaten and moldy, while the furniture was in an almost as bad condition from long neglect.

The fire-place held the charred remains of a fire that had gone out, and upon the table lay books, one of which was open and turned down at the page where the reader had left it, never to resume his reading.

"My poor father was reading this book the very day of his death."

"He laid it here, went forth and—to his death."

"Yes, went forth that moonlight night when I came home to beg forgiveness of him and of my mother, not knowing she was dead, and returned to see him die by the hand of my husband—*my pirate husband*."

"Oh, God have mercy upon me! but what haunting memories crowd upon me in this old home, this sacred spot."

"How happy was I here once with those I loved, and how could the destiny that led me to forsake them, to fly away in the night with one whom I believed an honorable man but discovered to be a sea outlaw."

"Repentant for the harm I had done, I came back, now three years ago, to beg forgiveness upon bended knees, and with my little boy to plead for me."

"Alas! my mother had been in her grave for a long while, dying of a broken heart, and my poor father haunted still the home, his reason gone, yes, a madman, for they had told my poor parents that their idolized daughter had become the bride of a buccaneer."

"Then came the crushing blow of all, when my husband shot my mad father down yonder on the cliff before my very eyes."

The woman dropped upon her knees before the table, covered her face with her hands and seemed anxious to shut out the terrible vision of the past which she had recalled.

But suddenly she sprang to her feet, dashing away the tears that filled her eyes and cried bitterly:

"What have I to do with weakness and tears, I who broke my mother's heart, whose act caused my father's death, I, the bride of a buccaneer chief, the Queen of the Pirate Isle, the mother of a son whose father was an outlaw of the sea."

"No! no! no! I have no right to show weakness, to feel that I am a woman to shed tears."

"I must be brave, be strong and shrink not, no matter how deep the iron of despair is driven into my soul."

She struck herself a severe blow over the heart, as though to still any tenderness gathering there, and taking up her lantern walked up to the wall whereon hung three portraits.

One of these, on the right, was a portrait of a handsome man of forty-five, with a noble, kindly face.

The one on the left was a likeness of a woman of thirty-seven perhaps, and the face was full of beauty and fascination, the face of a true woman.

The center portrait was turned with its face to the wall.

"Dare I turn it back?" gasped the woman.

"Father turned the face to the wall after I left home nearly ten years ago. Have I the courage to turn it back again, to look upon what I was then, and feel what I am now?"

"Have I the right to let it hang here, facing as they look, when they placed it as now it is?"

She stretched forth her hand and placed it upon the frame.

But there the hand rested with no motion to turn the picture back again.

For some time she stood thus undecided, but at last seemed to summon up courage, for she said in a full, determined voice:

"I will do it!"

Then she placed the lantern upon the table and deliberately turned the face of the picture to the front.

Quickly she started back, as though fearing to meet the silent gaze that must be turned upon her.

She stood with bowed head for a moment, but then, with a defiant toss of her haughty head raised it and gazed full upon the face of the portrait.

It was the face of a young girl of sixteen—the

face of the woman who gazed upon it, ere a shadow had fallen upon her young life, ere sorrow had wrung tears from her heart.

A beautiful face it was, with large dreamy eyes which seemed almost to be wells of sadness, holding prophetic visions of what lay in the future life of her.

Between that portrait of her girlhood and her womanhood she saw greater changes than twelve years had brought to her face and form, for still she was very beautiful to look upon.

Her life caused her to see only through a glass darkly, to behold only in bitterness, and from her lips came the cry:

"My God! how changed! how changed!"

Then quickly she turned the face of the portrait again to the wall, took up her lantern and left the house, walking rapidly back along the cliff.

At one place she halted, and murmured:

"Here it was my father fell—*by his hand*."

Then she continued on down the steep path to the bank of the little creek where the lugger had just been moored, towed in by the boats.

CHAPTER X.

A HIDDEN TREASURE.

THE lugger people were up at dawn, and the work of discharging the cargo was begun.

There was a large quantity of household furniture taken from the hold, and stored in tents pitched on shore, with provisions and all else that would be useful and necessary in establishing a home.

As fast as the crew of the lugger discharged the freight the negroes belonging to the fair passenger set up the tents and stowed them in safety ashore.

This occupied the day, and when night came on the lugger was ready to sail for the secret lagoon on the Gulf, where the slave-ship had been left in hiding.

The woman gave her instructions to Belt, and he at once put to sea, with a fair breeze that would give him a rapid run to the lagoon.

"Remember, Belt, you are not to run in except by night, and then only when you have a fair breeze that will bring you here quickly once you have entered the bay," she said.

"Yes, lady."

"And you are to have the slave-ship there in hiding, bringing all the slaves in the lugger, for they can stand the crowding for a few hours."

"Yes, lady."

"Upon your return I will know what I need in the way of lumber for the repair of the house, and you can run over to Pensacola and make the purchase."

"Mobile is a good port, lady, to purchase such things," suggested Belt.

"It may be, but I prefer Pensacola," was the sharp response, and the Indian sea-captain said no more but went on board the lugger and sailed away upon his mission.

The following morning, the woman, accompanied by Linda the negress and little Reginald, ascended the hill to the deserted home.

By day the desolation was far more marked than by night.

But the home was a comfortable one, or could be made so in a short while.

Still the woman seemed not pleased with things as they were, and seating herself on a rustic bench, began to draw her plans for improvements.

At last she seemed satisfied, and said to the negress:

"Linda, I shall make a grand old home of it here, for we are to here spend the remainder of our days."

"Yonder in the vale shall be the cabins of the people, while I will add to the house towers and rooms which will make it a dwelling-place fit for my son."

"The lugger will return to-night if the wind holds good, and to-morrow night he can run to Pensacola for all that is needed here."

"Oh! a grand home we will make us here, Linda, and no one will know but ourselves the strange story of our lives, our wanderings, and our sorrows."

"Yes, Missy Lucille, it will be mighty nice; but hain't the old place haunted?" asked Linda, who had all the superstitions of her race.

"Our hearts may be haunted, Linda, with bitter memories, but we will drive the spirits of the dead from this old spot, and live only for the pleasure we can find in life."

"Massa Reginald do like the place mighty well, Missy Lucille."

"Yes, and he will like it more when it is what I intend to make it, for it is to be his home and he shall live like a prince."

"Yes, missy, you is rich enough to make him a prince," was Linda's answer, and she walked on after Reginald, who was straying away, while the mysterious woman, who had sought a home in that weird spot, strolled off in the woodlands alone.

Her steps led her down the valley to the banks of the stream, in the mouth of which, half a mile away the lugger had found a haven.

There, amid a group of pines, was a small in-

closure, the palings of which were decaying fast.

Within the inclosure were two graves, the weeds having choked out the flowers that had been planted upon them.

There was no headstone over one, but at the head of the other stood a marble slab upon which was engraved:

"MY WIFE.

Died of a broken heart

May 1st, 1796."

"My mother," came in a wail from the woman's lips, and she knelt and rested her head upon the cold marble, to which she again and again pressed her lips.

Then her hand rested gently upon the unmarked grave and from her very heart seemed to be wrung the words:

"My poor, murdered father!

"Yes, and I am the one who was guilty of his death.

"My sin was great, yet here, at this sacred spot, may it some day be atoned."

For a long while she knelt there, but at last arose and walked on up the stream to a rustic bridge.

It shook beneath her weight, for no step had been upon it for years, and beyond there led no pathway.

But without hesitation she walked on through the woodland, crossed the vale and ascended to the summit of a range that ended in an abrupt spur overhanging the creek further down.

The way was choked with underbrush and as wild as a jungle, but on she went until she halted at a tree growing upon the spur.

Here she gazed down at her feet, and though no sign was there to indicate it, she said:

"Yes, this is the spot where I saw him bury the treasure, he little dreaming that my eyes were upon him.

"Here, beneath my feet lies hidden a king's fortune, and my son is the heir to all."

Back then to the house she made her way, and joining Linda and the boy they all returned to the camp on the stream just as the sun went down in a bank of piled-up clouds on the western horizon.

CHAPTER XI.

THE INDIAN'S PLEDGE.

THE lugger put in an appearance before daylight the following morning, for the wind was fresh and fair, and Belt had crowded on all sail to get into the cover of the creek before dawn came.

The craft was fairly black with humanity, the poor slaves who could not but wonder at all that was happening to them.

But Jocko calmed their fears by telling them all would be well very soon.

The woman met them as they came ashore, and Jocko stood by her side interpreting kind words to them.

Then they were marched to the camp which the negroes had prepared for them and were soon prostrate in slumber, after they had been given a substantial meal.

It was an hour after sunset before they were aroused and set to work, and under Jocko's instructions they did fairly well and seemed willing and anxious to be of service to the "White Queen," as they called the woman whom they now regarded in the light of a ruler and idol.

Through the day Belt and his crew of blacks also worked, and by nightfall, with the aid of axes the house on the cliff had been cleared of its old timbers and the dense foliage surrounding it.

That night the lugger sailed for Pensacola to purchase supplies, timber and other things needed, and in several days she ran into the creek heavily laden with the cargo sent for.

Another day Belt and his black crew worked, and still another, for the Indian captain seemed reluctant to leave the woman who now held such a strange influence over him.

But at last she told him that he must go, and placed in his hands double the amount in gold he had bargained with her for the expedition.

"You are too generous, lady," he faltered.

"I am but just, for you have aided me more than I can express to you, Belt, and here is a purse for each one of your crew as well.

"All I ask in return is that you one and all forget this voyage, blot it out of your memory, and remember nothing of your coming here with me, of the picking up of the slave-ship at sea or aught else."

"I will, lady, I will obey your commands."

"As must your crew, also, for here we are to be hidden from the world, my son, my people and myself.

"Circumstances beyond my control drove me away from my home, but it is mine, and I have returned to it to pass the remainder of my days.

"Should aught happen to ever again make me a wanderer, I will seek you, Belt, and perhaps again you can aid me; but now this is our last farewell, unless, as I said, circumstances drive me to seek you.

"Good-by, Belt, and success to you in life."

She held out her hand, and seizing it, he bent over and kissed it passionately.

She tried to withdraw it, but his grasp was like iron, and the intense nature of the man was aroused.

An Indian, with the taint of African blood in his veins, and also the blood of the white race, his nature partook more of the latter than of the red-skin and the negro.

He had been picked up at sea in his canoe, when a boy, driven off-shore in a storm, and had been given a berth before the mast, then taken on board an American man-of-war as a cabin-boy, and, taught by the officers, who fancied the bright youth, he had been taught to read and write.

One day he had saved the life of his captain, at the risk of his own, and the following day had killed a fellow-sailor who insulted him.

To escape punishment he had sprung into the sea, though the ship was miles from the shore, and in the cruiser's log had been put down as "Lost at sea."

But he had reached the shore, and sought a refuge among the buccaneers of Barrataria.

After serving with them until he became an officer upon a fleet pirate schooner, he had taken his ill-gotten plunder one night, put to sea in an open boat, and seeking New Orleans, had purchased a lugger, and sought to live the life of an honest coaster.

One day when he landed he had been met by a young man who had chartered his craft for a special cruise, offering a most generous sum for the service, which was to be rendered within a specified time.

That supposed youth was the woman in disguise who had been his passenger, the Lady Captain who had sought a refuge on the shores of Mobile Bay.

"Lady," he said in his musical tones, suppressed from deep feeling, "do not fear me, for I will respect your secret, and my crew are not aware that any mystery hangs over your life.

"What that mystery is I seek not to discover, but that you can trust me you may understand when I tell you that I know full well that you had upon my vessel a fortune in gold and gems."

The woman started and still strove to free her hand, but in vain.

He held the tiny hand in a grip she could not release it from, a grasp that pained her, while he continued in the same earnest tones:

"Where that fortune came from I do not seek to ask; but I know that I had it in my power, and more, that had I desired to win gold by treachery I could have carried the slave-ship to Cuba and sold the unfortunates for a sum that would have enriched me.

"But I acted as I deemed just to you and to my own honor, an Indian's honor, and because I loved you—nay, do not start, for I have no more to say—now."

"Farewell."

There was a strange emphasis upon the word now, but after his farewell he said no more, and turning quickly walked away.

Half an hour after the woman saw the lugger flying swiftly down Mobile Bay toward the Gulf of Mexico.

CHAPTER XII.

A MAD CLIENT.

LAWYER HANNIS TAYLOR was a man of note in the seaport town of Mobile at the time of which I write.

He was a man of vim and honesty as well, and in his hands were left the settlement of many intricate wills.

One that had proven as a dead letter to him was the will of Reginald Lomax, one time a rich New Orleans merchant who had passed his summers upon the eastern shores of Mobile Bay, where he had built him a substantial and comfortable home in a wilderness, as it were, for his neighbors were few and far between.

Here he had passed half the year with his family and servants, the latter African slaves.

Though a beautiful girl, a belle when at her home in New Orleans, Lucille Lomax had been content to dwell in the seclusion of the home by the sea with her parents, and appeared to be most happy there.

But one day it was rumored that the beautiful Lucille had mysteriously disappeared and all said that she had been drowned.

Some year or so afterward, her mother faded out like a flower, dying from grief at her daughter's going, and Reginald Lomax never afterward left his seaside home.

His business was disposed of in New Orleans, his slaves sold and the man lived the life of a hermit.

One stormy night, just as he was about to leave his library and retire, a visitor was announced to Lawyer Hannis Taylor.

He was shown in, and found to be a haggard-faced, wild-eyed man with long gray hair and beard.

He was dressed in sailor garb and his clothes

were drenched with spray, for he said that he had just landed, having crossed the bay in his little boat.

The lawyer knew him well, in spite of the change in him which half a dozen years had wrought.

Greeting him kindly, he ordered a hot drink for him and bade him be seated.

"I care not for drink, sir, and I have little time to remain, for I must get back to my home, as never must I pass a whole night away from the spot, for fear she may return and not find me there," said the visitor.

"To whom do you refer, Mr. Lomax?" asked the lawyer kindly.

"To my child."

The lawyer knew that the man was said to be mad, that his daughter was considered dead and that the home where he dwelt as a recluse was shunned by all and considered to be haunted.

"So you have news that your child is not dead?" he asked, chiming in with his humor.

"She is not dead, though her mother and I have long led people so to believe.

"It was better to have it so, Lawyer Taylor, for then no unkind slur, no stain of dishonor would be cast upon her name.

"But she is not dead, and some day will return.

"I am waiting for that day.

"I have long waited, and yet I grow not tired of the waiting.

"Still I suffer here," and he placed his hand upon his head in a piteful way.

"I suffer here, and I may break down, may die; and if she comes, I wish to have all arranged for her, and hence I came to you, Lawyer Taylor.

"I came to you to have you read my will over, have it signed and witnessed, and then leave it with you.

"Here is the will, Mr. Taylor, and I will read it as I have written it.

"I am not a poor man, and you can satisfy yourself as to the truth of the property I have.

"It shall all be in your hands, and when she returns she will seek you and know all, will know that we, her mother now in her grave, and I, did not cast her off, did not tear her image from our hearts.

"We talked it over, my poor dead wife and I, as she lay dying with her hand clasped in mine, and she asked me to forgive and forget the wrong our child had done us.

"So here is the will, lawyer, and I have come to you with it.

"Pay yourself liberally for your services, but see that the poor girl knows that we did not utterly ignore her for her sin; for sin it was, lawyer, yes, a grievous sin.

"I give the will to you, sir, as I know that my sands of life are running out, that my brain is turned, that I cannot last much longer.

"I have a presentiment of evil, that the day of my death is not far distant, and you know it is given to the crazed to read that which minds untouched by madness cannot read.

"Now, Lawyer Taylor, do you understand what is to be done?"

"Fully, Mr. Lomax, though let us hope that you may yet live many years, that your daughter may be alive and yet return to bless your declining years."

The lawyer said this in deepest sympathy, for he believed the daughter to be dead, that it was but the imagining of a diseased mind that caused the father to believe her alive, and that she had been guilty of some sin that had brought sorrow upon them.

But he took the will and read it carefully over, remarking when he finished it:

"This is as complete a document, Mr. Lomax, as any lawyer could draw up."

"I am glad of it, for I wished it so.

"Now, call your witnesses and let me sign it."

The wife and a guest of the lawyer were called, the will was signed and duly returned, and out into the darkness and storm went the mad client, to spring into his boat and dare the dangers in a run back to his desolate home across the bay.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MISSING HEIR.

SOME time after the visit of his mad client Lawyer Hannis Taylor learned that the Hermit of Red Cliff was dead, or, that is, that he had disappeared.

He sent over the boy to investigate, and his messenger returned with the information that the man was dead and a new-made grave by the side of his wife showed that some kind hand had placed him there, to be near her in death.

And then, more than now and then to hear that the home on Red Cliffs was shunned as an ill-omened spot and was believed to be haunted, Lawyer Taylor heard no more of the dead man or his heir.

He had tried to find if there was an heir to the estate, but failed, so the matter was allowed to rest, the property steadily increasing in value and the money adding up each year more largely in the banks.

That the daughter of Reginald Lomax yet lived the lawyer did not believe.

So years passed away and one night Lawyer Taylor was again seated in his handsome library.

The wind howled dismally without and he was thinking that it was a bad night at sea, when a servant entered and said that there was a young sailor who desired to see him.

"Admit him," was the answer and the lawyer wondered at the late call of his visitor and somehow his thoughts turned to just such a night years ago when Reginald Lomax had called upon him.

The door opened and broke in upon his reverie, and he looked up somewhat curiously at his visitor.

He was a mere youth in appearance, enveloped in a tarpaulin and long storm-cloak.

Doffing his tarpaulin as he saw the lawyer, he asked, in a low voice:

"May I ask, sir, if you are Lawyer Hannis Taylor?"

"Yes, my lad; be seated, and say how I can serve you, though first throw off your storm-coat."

"I thank you, sir," and the youth obeyed, revealing a slender, graceful form, and a face full of intelligence and fearlessness; a face, thought the lawyer, that a woman might envy for its beauty of feature and expression.

"Now, my lad, how can I serve you?" asked the lawyer, in a low tone.

For full a minute there was no reply, and the youth seemed to be striving to gain perfect control over himself, for that he was deeply moved from some cause his actions plainly revealed.

At last he said:

"I believe, Lawyer Taylor, that you drew up the last will and testament of Merchant Reginald Lomax?"

"Ah!"

The lawyer was almost startled.

At last he had some clew to an heir.

But he became calm at once, and responded:

"No, I did not draw up the last will and testament of the late Reginald Lomax."

He spoke purposely as he did, and noted the look of disappointment that flashed over the face of the youth.

"I have been misinformed then, sir."

"Not altogether, as I will explain."

"Pray do so, sir."

"I did not draw up the will, for the simple fact that Mr. Lomax did so himself, and a most able document he made of it, too, one that would stand the test of any trial for or against."

"May I ask if Mr. Lomax was a lawyer at one time of his life?"

The lawyer asked the question in the most innocent manner, but he meant it for a leading question.

He would discover at once, if he could trap the youth, what he knew of Reginald Lomax.

The answer came in the same innocent way as that in which the lawyer had spoken:

"Yes, sir, he was in early life a lawyer, but gave up practice when left a paying mercantile business by an uncle."

"I thought so, after reading that will."

"But what would you know about the will, my young friend?"

"Are you sure, sir, that Mr. Lomax is dead?"

"I am."

"Have you any proofs?"

"I sent over the boy, upon hearing of his death, a trusty messenger who brought me convincing evidence of his death."

"May I ask how he died?"

"That appears to be a mystery to every one."

"Was he not killed?"

"Ah! it may be so, but yet he was buried decently by the side of his wife."

"By whom?"

"That is also unknown."

"Now, sir, have you the will in your keeping?"

"It is in the keeping of the court, but I have a copy of it."

"And had Mr. Reginald Lomax no heir?"

"That is just the question I have desired to find out for years."

"For what purpose?"

"Well, should he have no heir then his fortune goes to a very worthy charity."

"As what, for instance?"

"The establishment of a home for the insane."

The lawyer saw the start the youth gave at his reply, and then came the question:

"Do you believe that Mr. Lomax was insane?"

"His reason had been deranged through the mysterious loss of his daughter, who, to the day of his death, he believed would yet return, for he could not be brought to believe her dead as did all others."

"You so believed, sir?"

"I did and do."

"Did Mr. Lomax leave an heir to his fortune?"

"Had he a son, may I ask? or do you know?"

"I do know, sir."

"He had no son."

"You knew him?"

"I did, sir, well."

"And do you know of any missing heir who can claim his fortune, rather than have it go to the charity I named?"

"I do, sir," was the firm response of the youth.

CHAPTER XIV.

UNDER FALSE COLORS.

THE response of the youth was not a surprise to Lawyer Hannis Taylor, for the answer was expected.

The lawyer had already decided in his own mind that the youth was a claimant for the fortune of the dead man, but whether he could bring forward a just claim or not was the question.

"You know of an heir to the fortune of Reginald Lomax, you say?" he questioned, and he regarded the youth more closely.

"I do, sir."

"Who is this heir, and where can I look for him or her?"

"You need not look far sir, for I am the heir."

"You?"

"Yes, sir."

"There is no mention in the will of a young man being heir?"

"May I ask you to read the will to me, sir."

"What claim have you to hear it?"

"When I have heard it, sir, you shall know."

The lawyer arose, crossed to his iron safe and took therefrom a bundle of papers.

These he laid upon the table by his side and said:

"Here is the report of my messenger regarding his finding out the death and burial of Reginald Lomax."

"Yes, sir."

"This is a list of the fortune in full, consisting of real estate in New Orleans, a mansion and grounds upon the eastern shore of Mobile Bay, and which include some thousand or more acres, some shares in a shipping line and money in banks, to which is added the interest that has accumulated and dividends paid in by the Packet Ship Company."

"Then the property was of considerable value."

"It is to-day, sir, far more so than when Mr. Lomax was alive."

"And the will?"

"Here is the copy of the will, the last paper in the package."

The lawyer unfolded the document and read about all that it contained, the youth, the while, showing the deepest attention.

"And all this is left to his daughter Lucille, sir?"

"Yes, as you have heard, in case she returned within ten years, after which it was to go to the founding of an insane asylum, though there is the clause, as you heard, that should she return after such disposition of the fortune, she should have a regular income for life from the institution, one sufficient to keep her beyond all poverty."

"I understand, sir; but should she have an heir?"

"Of that nothing was said."

"Then her child would be penniless, sir?"

The lawyer regarded his visitor still more attentively.

Could it be that this was the son of the missing Lucille?

Could she have wedded secretly before her disappearance?

Then the lawyer shook his head, for he recalled that it had been about twelve years since Lucille Lomax had disappeared and she was then, her father had informed him, about eighteen years of age.

The limit of the will to await the coming of the heir was ten years, and that had some years to run yet.

"No," mused Lawyer Taylor!

"This youth is all of eighteen so cannot be the son of Lucille Lomax."

"But who is he?"

"By Jupiter! but I have even forgotten to ask his name."

Then turning to the youth he asked again:

"You say that Mr. Lomax had no son?"

"He did not, sir."

"Had he other children than this daughter Lucille?"

"No, sir."

"How do you know?"

"I know the family well, sir."

"You are young to have remembered years ago about what I ask you."

"I am older, sir, than I appear to you."

"May I ask your name?"

"My name is Revello," and the youth spoke without the slightest hesitation.

"Ah! you are Spanish then?"

"No, sir."

"It is a Spanish name."

"True."

"And you are not a Spaniard?"

"I am not."

"Nor Mexican?"

"I am not."

"Your English is perfect."

"I am an American."

"I see, and your father was doubtless Spanish?"

"No, sir."

"Revello, you say is your name?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, my lad, now tell me what claim you have on the fortune of the late Reginald Lomax?"

"I did not say, sir, that I had any claim."

"But would give me a reason for wishing to see the will of Mr. Lomax?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, I shall be glad to know that reason, for you called upon me for some purpose connected with a claim to the Lomax estate, I feel confident."

"I did, sir."

"Well, out with it, my lad."

"I am the heir to that fortune, sir."

"You?"

"I am, sir."

"Of course, when you make such a claim you must show proof to substantiate it."

"I expect to do so, and will, Mr. Taylor."

"I need hardly tell you that your claim cannot be allowed."

"And why?"

"Because the property is willed either to the daughter of Mr. Lomax, whom he would not believe to be dead, or to found the insane asylum, as you distinctly heard."

"I understand all that, Mr. Taylor, but the fortune is mine by inheritance, and it is to prove to you that such is the case that I have called upon you to-night."

"I will bear what proofs you have, sir, but it remains just the same that you cannot get one dollar of the Lomax fortune."

The youth smiled and then responded impressively:

"Lawyer Taylor, I am sailing under false colors, for I am not a youth, as you believe, but a woman—"

"I am Lucille, the daughter of Reginald Lomax!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE HEIRESS.

LAWYER HANNIS TAYLOR was a man of good self-control, but when his visitor announced that he was talking to a woman, not a youth, he uttered an exclamation of surprise and sprung to his feet in amazement.

"You are Lucille Lomax?" he cried in sheer astonishment at beholding before him one whom he had felt certain was dead.

Her presence before him, if she spoke the truth, showed that Mr. Lomax had not told him all, that he had kept back something and was in possession of information which he had not made known to him regarding his daughter.

After all then she had not been lost, but had mysteriously disappeared.

But he must have proofs, and so he again asked the question, which his visitor had not yet answered:

"Are you Lucille Lomax?"

"I was Lucille Lomax, sir, but now I am Lucille Revello."

"Ah! that means that you are married?"

"It means that I was married."

"You are a widow?"

"Yes."

"When were you married?"

"The day I left my father's home."

"And you have the certificate of your marriage?"

The face of the disguised woman flushed at this question, and an angry light shone in her eyes, while she replied:

"What have you to do with whether I was or was not married, sir?"

"Pardon me, but there is a clause in the will that may have escaped your observation."

"It certainly did, sir, if it referred to my marriage."

"Will you bear me read it?"

"Yes, sir."

"It was from no idle curiosity I asked the question, no desire to probe into your private life, but here is the clause," and he read aloud as follows:

"Should my daughter have given up her life as a single woman, unless she can show her claims to the sacred claim of being a wife, she is not to be the inheritor of my fortune, which will go as in case of her death, to the charity before named."

"I did fail to catch that clause in the will, sir, by some strange oversight," said Lucille.

"You will pardon me then for the question regarding your certificate?"

"Certainly."

"And you can show the proof of your marriage?"

"Assuredly, for I brought it with me as proof of my identity, sir."

She took from her bosom an official-looking paper as she spoke and handed it to the lawyer who hastily glanced over it.

It was well worn and bore the date of years before; but it also bore the evidence of being genuine and the lawyer said:

"I see that you were married here in Mobile,

by Reverend Father La Blanche, to one Rudolph Revello of Mexico."

"Yes, sir."

"Father La Blanche is dead."

"So I heard, sir."

"And these witnesses I happen to know are dead."

"Of that I do not know, sir," but here is a silent witness which may be stronger proof than the signatures of the dead."

She handed to him a ring as she spoke.

He glanced curiously at it and said:

"This is a ring that once belonged to Father La Blanche, for I knew him well, and recall it on account of its peculiarity."

"Yes, sir, Captain Revello, for he was a captain in the Mexican Navy, forgot to secure a ring, and I handed him one that I wore."

"But the father said it was bad luck to wed one with a ring I had worn, and so he took this one from his finger and gave it to me, and you will see that it bears his name."

"In return I sent him for his church a liberal sum for charity."

"The ring I have worn ever since, sir."

"I believe there is no doubt, at least in my mind there is none, that you are Lucille Lomax, and were married."

"Your husband, you say, is dead?"

"Yes, sir."

"When did he die?"

"He died at sea several years ago."

"You are sure he is dead?"

"I saw his dead body, sir, for he was killed by Bertrando the Buccaneer."

"It strikes me that I recall something of that kind now."

"If I am right, he captured Bertrando's vessel, but the buccaner boarded her and retook her from him in a fight as the vessel ran out to sea."

"Yes, sir, such was about the affair."

"Well, Mrs. Revello, for so I must call you now, I see no reason why you should not have your property, and let me tell you that it is considerable."

"I thank you, Mr. Taylor, and as you have decided in my favor, permit me to say now that not a dollar will I touch of it."

"What?"

"I will let the fortune go to the charity my father intended it should, in case of my death; but the old home over the bay I do wish to possess."

"I can give that to you, of course, if you decline to accept it all, which permit me to urge you to do."

"I will not accept, sir, even the place at Red Cliffs, for I intend to pay you what you deem its value, and the money goes with the rest of the fortune to the object my father intended."

"This is a strange proceeding, Mrs. Revello."

"It is nevertheless just what I intend to do, sir."

"You know best, and I will do as you request."

"And the valuation of the Red Cliffs plantation?"

"Is put down on my list here at six thousand dollars."

The woman arose, unbuckled a belt from about her waist and counted out from it in crisp bank-notes the sum named.

CHAPTER XVI.

REFUSING AN INHERITANCE.

MR. TAYLOR looked at his fair visitor in surprise, as she counted out the money from her belt.

He saw that she had plenty more left in the belt, yet wondered the more at her strange act in giving up her fortune, rich though she might be.

He could not understand her motive, so ceased to puzzle his brain further about it.

He took the money, ran over the amount and handed her in return a receipt for it, while he said:

"The deed shall be at once made out for you."

"Make it in the name of Reginald Revello, if you please."

"But your husband you told me was—"

"The one I refer to is my son."

"Ah yes, certainly."

"And, Mr. Taylor, permit me to say to you that Lucille Lomax is also dead, at least in name, and I do not wish to be known as being alive to any one."

"I am a stranger in the land that I once knew so well, and loved so dearly; but I have come back here to dwell in the old home with my son and my people."

"Your people?"

"I mean my slaves, for I have brought them with me."

"I see."

"And I expect you to keep my secret, sir."

"It shall remain inviolate, madam."

"I shall dwell on the Red Cliffs plantation, and there hope to pass my days in contentment and peace, if not in happiness."

"The past is as a closed book to me. I live in

the present, and hope for the future; but no one must know that in the Senora Revello the daughter of Reginald Lomax can be traced, for she is dead to herself and to the world."

"May I trust you, Lawyer Taylor?"

"Wholly so, my dear madam, I pledge you my word; and more: if I can at any time serve you in any way, I beg you to command my services."

"I shall do so, sir, taking you at your word."

"Now let me ask you to name the fee for your last services?"

"That your father arranged, thank you."

"To your satisfaction?"

"Entirely so."

"And you will at once begin the work to carry out this act of charity?"

"Under the supposition that you are dead?"

"Yes."

"I will do so."

"I thank you, sir, and will now bid you good-night."

"But the storm is wilder even than when you came, and I cannot permit you to go out in it."

"I do not fear rough weather, sir, and I am well protected against it."

"But it is too bad a night, and I can accommodate you here, for, though my family have retired, the butler can show you to your room."

"I thank you again, but I must depart, and at once, for I have a long run before me."

"You surely do not mean that you are to leave port to-night in this storm?"

"I came into port to-night, Mr. Taylor, so can as readily leave it, for, as I said, I care little for rough weather."

"You are a brave woman, to dare such danger, and I wish I could urge you against it."

"No, sir, I do not fear the sea, for the past twelve years of my life have been passed upon the ocean."

"Now I will again bid you good-night, and remember, Lucille Lomax is dead."

"I shall not forget, madam—good-night," and the lawyer held forth his hand.

The woman grasped it warmly, again thanked him, and left the room.

Hardly had she done so when Lawyer Taylor followed her quickly into the hall.

The negro butler had just closed the door behind her, when the lawyer said:

"Quick, Buster, my heavy coat, storm-hat and boots."

They were brought at once, and the lawyer donned them hastily, with the remark:

"Wait in the library for my return, Buster."

Leaving the house he saw that the storm was raging fiercely; but he hastened on down the street, where he beheld a form walking briskly along toward the river shore.

He kept the form just in sight, and followed until it disappeared among the wharves.

Hastening on he approached a pier just as he heard the creaking of a block as a sail was raised.

Up into the air went a sail, reefed down, and then a jib rose on the stays.

From his hiding-place the lawyer could hear no voices, no orders given, but he saw a boat swing off from the pier and then dart away.

Just then there came a vivid flash of lightning, and the little vessel was revealed distinctly in every part.

It was a sloop of some five tons burden, with her mainsail and jib reefed down and cabin closed.

Upon her decks was but one person visible, and that one stood in the cockpit, his hand grasping the tiller.

But the lightning revealed that it was his late visitor, for that much he saw.

"My God! she is alone!"

"She will be lost," he cried, excitedly, and he shouted loudly:

"Sloop ahoy! Put back that craft at once!"

"Put back, I say!"

But the winds blew his words back into his mouth, and if heard by the one who held the tiller of the sloop, no response came, and no indication that the woman intended to obey.

Out into the river darted the sloop, then she went about, and like an arrow sped down the river toward the bay, soon disappearing from the view of the lawyer, who slowly returned homeward, convinced that the Heiress of Red Cliffs had gone to her doom.

CHAPTER XVII.

A MYSTERIOUS SETTLEMENT.

RUMORS were rife in the then town of Mobile, that a strange people had made a dwelling-place upon the eastern shore of the bay.

It was said that the old house of Reginald Lomax, known as the Haunted Homestead of Red Cliffs, had been taken by the new-comers, and was being thoroughly overhauled, rebuilt and enlarged.

In fact, soon from the waters of the bay a very imposing structure reared itself there on Red Cliffs, half hidden amid the towering pine and magnolia trees.

There were towers, one rising far above the others and in a cupola of which, shone a light

each night, casting its rays far across the waters like a beacon.

The house was very spacious, rambling and comfortable, and it had been built of hewn logs put together almost as solidly as stone.

There were wide verandas overlooking the bay, and about the mansion were flower gardens and ornamental grounds.

In truth, the grand-looking structure soon took on the appearance of a palace, while in the vale beyond were half a hundred log cabins in which dwelt a queer race of Africans.

They were black as ink, tall, athletic and well formed, spoke no language but their own strange tongue, and dressed in a most barbarous attire, wearing feather robes, and ornaments of shells, animal teeth and ivory.

The fields about the Castle of Red Cliffs as it became known, were put into a thorough state of cultivation, and the whole place had been completely metamorphosed in the shortest space of time.

The strange-looking blacks in their canoes were seen each morning at dawn upon the waters fishing, or sailing about, and afterward went to the fields to work, or to beautifying the grounds about the mansion.

Then came the question, when this mysterious settlement was reported in Mobile and along the bay shore:

"Who is the ruling spirit of this grand house, its surroundings and these strange black people?"

This question rumor could not answer, though it was said that a small West Indian yacht of the *goleta* rig was seen cruising about the bay, with a mere boy at the tiller, a woman in black seated near him and a crew of negroes forward.

This yacht floated a strange flag, a gold anchor in a blue field, and was seen to run for a haven to a creek near the Red Cliffs.

Vessels going from and coming into port, hearing of the mysterious settlement, were wont to stand well over toward the eastern shore for a closer look at the strange abode, hoping to find out something more regarding those who dwelt there.

Rumor had it that the owner was a rich Mexican lady, whose husband had been shot as a conspirator, while she and her son were banished from the country and had sought a refuge on the shores of Mobile Bay, bringing with her a vast fortune and her slaves.

Others said that she was the wife of a Cuban conspirator against Spain, and still other tales were told of the strange woman and her mysterious settlement.

There was one who dwelt in the seaport across the bay who might have spoken had he chosen to do so.

That one was Lawyer Hannis Taylor.

He knew just who that strange woman was.

He knew that it was she who had been known in girlhood as Lucille Lomax, she who had wedded a Mexican officer, and at his death came to seek a home where she had dwelt in the long ago.

The mystery of her leaving her home and parents as she had, he could not understand, but she had done so, and returning was as one dead to the world.

He had supposed her lost the night he had seen her dash away from Mobile in her little sloop, that night of storm.

But he had soon learned that a woman was building the grand house across the bay, erecting a palace of logs, and he knew that she had safely weathered the gale and reached her home.

Where had she gotten these strange black people who were her slaves?

Had her husband been a Mexican slave-owner, or had he been secretly a slaver?

The more he thought it over the more a mystery it became to him, and at last he decided to let time solve the puzzle.

He heard the rumors of the grand palace, and all that was told regarding the woman and the strange people with whom she had surrounded herself.

So he decided to have a look for himself, and inviting a pleasure party for a sail one day, stood over toward the eastern shore.

There rose the massive structure, well though quickly erected, and over its highest turret floated the blue flag with its golden anchor.

Turning his glass upon the flag he saw that in each corner of the flag there was a small device.

In one he saw a red hand clasping a white one.

In a second corner was a pair of broken manacles, and in a third was a ring of gold with a break in it.

The fourth corner had in it a pair of crossed swords, the blades being red.

"The anchor of gold and those four devices are emblems of some scenes or events in her life I am sure," mused the lawyer.

There were those of the party who urged to land, and at last he gave a reluctant consent and ran for the little pier in the mouth of the creek.

But there stood a negro in black livery, and to a hail given him, he responded:

"The Senora Revello receives no visitors."

So the yacht was put about, and sailing back

to port, Lawyer Taylor pondered the more upon the mysterious life led by the woman who had wished to be dead to the world.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE INDIAN CAPTAIN'S RESOLVE.

WHEN Belt, the Indian captain, sailed away from Red Cliffs, after bidding farewell to Lucille Revello, it was with a strange feeling at his heart which he had never known before.

The woman had taught him what it was to love, and his whole nature was wrapped up in the desire to win her.

"I am not ill looking, for people have said I was handsome, I am not ill-formed, for I see how superior I am to other men, and then I have an education and the power to love.

"I am poor, and that is against me.

"Rich, I can win her love, and, rich I shall be, whatever the means I take to win riches.

"I am no slave, and, though I have the taint of a slave's blood in my veins, I am of a race that were born free and will ever remain so, for who can ever enslave an Indian.

"I will at once cast behind me this idle life, this humble existence as a skipper of an honest coaster.

"I have been a pirate, and I tried to cut loose forever from that lawless past and become an honest man.

"Well, what need I weigh honesty against my love for that beautiful creature?

"To me she is all the world, my life, my soul, my future, and I will win her yet, for, if I have riches she will be mine.

"I will first try the course of mining gold that now opens before me; but if that fails, then I shall try to get riches under the black flag.

"Now to the lagoon to see just what that craft needs for repairs and stores, and then to New Orleans to get them and enlarge my crew."

So mused Belt Despard the Indian captain, as his fleet lugger sped down Mobile Bay after leaving Red Cliffs.

Out into the waters of the Mexican Gulf she swept, thence down the coast, and hence onward by a fair breeze ran into the inlet just at dawn.

Across the lagoon and thence into the sluggish stream where lay at anchor the wreck of the slave-ship.

She was half-hidden beneath the festoons of Spanish moss which overhung her decks from the spreading branches of the trees growing upon the banks, and no one who would not have suspected her presence there could have found her very easily.

Running alongside Belt Despard sprung on shore, and at once made his way to the cabin.

There he found three persons.

They were blacks, and two were men, one was a woman.

The elder of the men was a tall, splendidly-formed fellow with a dignified carriage and manly air about him.

He wore in his nose and ears gold rings, and bracelets of the same metal upon his arms, indicating his rank as a chief among his people.

The other male was a youth of perhaps eighteen, erect as a statue, and with a bold, fearless face.

He too wore gold bracelets, but no ear or nose rings.

The third was a woman about thirty, and that she was the mother of the youth, and the chief his father there was no doubt.

They rose as the Indian captain entered and then bowed their heads before him.

Speaking slowly he said:

"I have kept my promise to Ululah the Congo chief, his son and his wife, and returned for them.

"I knew that the others were their foes, of a different tribe, and so sought to kill them the night I returned here for them, for they left them to die here.

"I did not tell the White Queen what the others had done, for I wished you for my friend, and so I have come for you, to take you back to your home in Africa, or let you remain with me, just as you please."

The African chief listened with the deepest attention to the words of Belt.

It was true that his wife and son had been captured by the slavers along with the others who were of a different tribe from them, and the others had determined to desert the three Congo people, leaving them to die in the slave ship, when the lugger returned for them.

But one of the negro crew of the lugger had told his captain, after the vessel set sail, that he believed some of the Africans had been treacherously dealt with by the others, and Belt had at once returned to the wreck.

He found the three Congo people bound securely, released them, and to his surprise discovered that the chief spoke very fair English, and from him he learned the history of the capture of himself and family, and how they had been ill-treated by the others, being in constant fear of death at their hands.

Upon hearing all, a sudden idea had flashed

upon the mind of the Indian captain, and that was to make use of these three people.

If he took them to Red Cliffs with the others their death would follow, once they had landed, for even though fellow-captives in a far-away land from their own, the blacks he knew would not let their hatred against a foe die out, but would wreak their vengeance upon the chief and his family when opportunity offered.

"You remain here for me, Ululah," he had said, "for I will return for you.

"I will leave you food in plenty, and I will be your friend."

They consented when he had explained his purpose, and so the lugger sailed without them, those on board never suspecting that their secret had been discovered to leave them to perish.

And so it was that Belt returned in the lugger after his leaving Lucille Revello, to keep his promise made to the three Africans.

CHAPTER XIX.

ACROSS THE SEAS.

THE negro crew of the lugger were much amazed, excepting the one who had told his suspicions to the Indian captain, to find in the cabin of the wrecked slave-ship three Africans.

They saw, too, that their captain was determined to treat them with great consideration, and they, the crew, were told to be most kind to them.

Then Belt began to inspect the slave-ship.

He went from stem to stern below decks, examining every part of the hull closely, and also every other part of the vessel.

His inspection lasted nearly all day, and he jotted down in a note-book all that he needed to refit the vessel thoroughly, to put her in perfect trim.

"What I have in bank in New Orleans, and what gold Madam Revello liberally paid me, will be more than enough for my needs," he said as he finished making his inspection of the vessel.

Then he left more food with the three Africans, told them that he would return within a couple of weeks at furthest, and going on board the lugger, set sail just at sunset.

Across the lagoon, out of the inlet, and then across the waters of the Gulf he went, his destination being the Balize.

Fair winds favored him, and the lugger dropped anchor before the city of New Orleans, the second night after leaving the secret lagoon.

Early the following morning the Indian captain went to make his purchases.

He drew his money from the bank, bought stores sufficient for a nine months' cruise for a crew of a hundred men, purchased new canvas, ropes, spars, paints and all necessary articles for the complete refitting of a vessel.

There were sent on board of the lugger, along with cases of muskets, cutlasses, boarding-pikes and pistols.

It took several days to purchase all he needed and get them loaded on the lugger, and then a day more to secure a dozen more men in crew.

But at last the lugger, loaded deeply, was ready to sail and, dropping down the river one night, the next day had left the Balize astern on her run back to the lagoon.

Thus had Belt Despard shipped his last cargo as an honest coaster, for the future was before him for another life.

He ran into the lagoon under cover of the night, just ten days after leaving it, and found the slave-ship as he had left it, with the three Africans on board.

Among the new men he had shipped were several ship carpenters, and they were at once put to work to cut out masts from the tall and stately pines that bordered the shores of the lagoons.

And so the work of repairing the slave-ship was begun, from keel to deck, all working hard to complete the vessel as soon as it was possible to do so.

Ululah and his son also joined in the work, for they were told that the ship was to carry them home, and the woman was not long in learning to make herself useful in many ways.

Thus the weeks went by until two months had passed, and one day Belt Despard stood upon the quarter-deck of his completed vessel, as fine a craft as there was afloat, if appearances went for anything.

Her new masts were extremely tall and tapering, fitting her to perfection, and every spar was just what was needed.

The rigging was all that could be desired, the sails fitted as flat as boards, and a tremendous amount of canvas she spread too.

When at last she was ready to sail, the anchor was gotten up, the boats just out astern and the vessel was slowly towed out into the lagoon.

Feeling the breeze she swung around, her sharp bows pointed seaward, and when the boats were called aboard she went dashing seaward as though eager to once more battle with the storms which had once so ill-treated her.

Out of the inlet she passed with fully a foot of water beneath her keel, and feeling the incoming breakers, plunged into them with a vim, burying her sharp, low bows as though rejoicing to feel the spray once more upon her decks,

The black crew were delighted with their new vessel, while Belt Despard walked the deck a proud man at his triumph.

He had sailed upon many a fine vessel, yet never one the equal of the one whose deck he then trod.

He had been an officer on board a pirate schooner that could show her heels to any cruiser, blow high or blow low, but she was nothing to compare with the craft he then trod the deck of.

He had owned his lugger, left hidden away in the lagoon until he should return from his cruise, but what was that honest coasting craft, fleet and staunch though she was, to the beautiful vessel he could now call himself master of?

"I will call her the Destroyer, for such she shall become if that woman refuses my love, casts me away from her.

"It is with her to make me a good man or a demon, and a half-year more will tell the story of which it shall be.

"Now for the coast of Africa, and the chief I have on board will guide me to the tribe who would have slain him, his wife and son, and there will I get me a cargo of captives to sell as slaves and thus be enriched.

"Yes, riches will soon be within my grasp, and if Lucille Revello can be won by them, so be it—if not, then the world is before me to carve out my life as best suits my humor."

And so musing, the Indian captain pointed the sharp prow of his vessel across the seas.

CHAPTER XX.

THE BLACK SLAVER.

STEALING along the African Coast, some sixty days after leaving the lagoon on the shores of the Gulf of Mexico, the schooner which Belt Despard had christened the Destroyer, was in search of a haven.

The newness had gone from hull, canvas and spars, and there was an appearance that the craft had been battling with severe weather.

But the crew were the better for it, and captain and men had come to know their craft thoroughly, and soon had no fear of any foe overhauling them, for she had time and again, in her run to the coast, distanced all pursuit from cruisers.

It was daylight now, and the schooner was holding well in to the coast, for Ululah, the African chief, had said that he would know his country when he saw it.

There was a small river, he had said, which penetrated to fastnesses inland; but off the shore he had fished in the sea in their safe boats, or had gone up and down the coast for miles in their war canoes to attack a neighboring tribe.

And there on the deck of the schooner stood Ululah and his son, near Belt Despard, who was watching them as they gazed landward, seeking for some familiar object.

The schooner was under lower sails, and was dashing along briskly with the wind off shore, all ready to square away and run for the river as soon as it should be discerned.

As the sun neared the horizon, Ululah suddenly seized his son by the shoulder and eagerly pointed landward, while he spoke rapidly in his own tongue.

The son glanced, and at once became excited, and the two communed rapidly together for a minute or more, Belt coolly watching them.

At last Ululah turned to the Indian captain, and said:

"We are near the river, though, as I said, it cannot be seen; but there are landmarks which Kaloo and myself know well.

"See, there rises a hill, and those trees in a group are where we have camped—where we once fought a battle with our foes, who came by the sea to attack us, the very people who sought to kill us on the slave-ship."

In his two months' voyage both Ululah and his son had learned to speak English well, picking it up with wonderful aptness, and the chief had spoken without hesitation.

He seemed happy to again behold his own land, and calling to his wife to come on deck, the three Africans stood with outstretched arms toward the shore, while they chanted a wild, weird song of joy.

When this was over Captain Belt bade the chief take the helm, for he had become a fair sailor also, and to head the schooner inshore to a haven.

There appeared to be no break in the densely foliage-clad shores, but at last an opening was seen and the schooner glided straight toward the mouth of the river.

"You are sure there is water enough, chief," asked Belt, somewhat anxiously.

"Yes, White Captain, it is very deep."

"How deep?"

"Up to there," and the chief pointed to the peak of the mainsail.

"That is ample depth, but I will throw the line," and the order was given to take soundings.

The first throw of the lead brought forth the report:

"Six fathoms!"

Sail was shortened until the mainsail and jib alone remained and men stood by the halyards

to lower them at an instant's notice should it be necessary.

The lead still showed ample depth, running from five to four fathoms, until suddenly there came a quick call of three fathoms, which was, however, immediately followed by the call: "Five fathoms!"

"That was the bar of the river, and we are all right now," said Belt, and the depth that continued showed that he was right.

The break in the shore ahead now widened and the schooner glided into the river, the shores of which were sandy like the beach for some distance inland.

Then came higher banks until a bold promontory was reached, and along this the vessel glided, men sprung ashore, and the vessel was moored in safety.

It was here, Ululah explained, that the great battle had been fought between the hostile tribes when he was in command of his people, and had been badly wounded, the scars of which he revealed in his broad breast.

Kaloo, at that time a boy of twelve, was with his father in the battle and had also been wounded, though he killed the antagonist who had given him the wound.

The three Africans sprung ashore with the greatest delight, and the chief explained that the village of his people was distant some twenty miles up the river, up among a range of hills he had pointed out from the schooner's deck when a league off-shore.

Night had now fallen, and it was decided to await until the morrow before going to the village.

Captain Belt boldly determined to go with the chief to his people, for he had made the venture to carry out his bold plans, and nothing should deter him from doing so.

He held a slight suspicion that after all the chief might prove treacherous, but then he must risk that, and when his two negro mates suggested that he go with the chief and hold the son and wife as hostages for his safe return, he would not hear to it.

"No, I go alone, and I take all chances, for the fate that I blindly follow now will protect me to fulfill the destiny which is before me," was the answer of the Indian captain.

CHAPTER XXI.

A SAVAGE CREW.

IN the run over, Belt Despard had treated the three Africans with marked consideration.

He was determined to win their gratitude and perfect confidence.

Whether he had been successful or not, he knew was yet to be tried.

He was well aware that the chief belonged to one of the most savage of two coast tribes, a people who were desperate fighters and loved to be at war.

They were perfect demons in battle, and had awed other tribes treble their numbers.

Their raids upon their neighbors had made them rich in booty and captives, and they were known also as sea warriors, for they had large war canoes which they managed well, and even ventured far up and down the coast in them.

Hence they were a race of sailors as well as landsmen and were greatly feared by all the surrounding tribes.

It was while in his canoe with his wife, son and several of his warriors, on a trip down the river, that Ululah had been captured by the slavers then anchored in the river.

His warriors had been shot, when attempting to escape, but the chief had run the canoe boldly out to sea in the face of a blow.

The slaver had her cargo on board, captured from another tribe, and pursuing, the chief was picked up, and with his wife and son became captives along with the others.

That he was considered dead in his tribe he was assured; but his return would make all things even, and if the usurper of his place cared not to yield it, then he would have to fight for it, that was all.

Such was the explanation given by Ululah to Belt Despard, of his capture and the situation at home.

When ready the next morning to start, Captain Belt decorated the three Africans out most gorgeously, and four of the crew were selected to carry presents for the tribe.

These presents went in bales swung on long poles carried between two men, and there were beads, brass ornaments, knives and pistols, all that would delight the savage eye.

Then the schooner was left in charge of the first officer, an able negro sailor, and the march was taken up for the village of Ululah.

The chief led the way at a good swinging walk and sometime before sunset the climb of the hills was begun and the village appeared in sight.

There was an outpost on guard, watching for any foe that might appear, the alarm was given, tom-toms resounded, wild cries were heard, and when the little party came near the village they saw that all were ready to receive them as foes.

But Ululah gave a wild, shrill war-cry, his cry in battle, known so well to his warriors, and instantly all was the wildest excitement.

As he came forward and revealed himself, followed by Kaloo and Apidah, there was a rush toward him and for some time he seemed to be fairly overwhelmed.

It looked to Belt like a free fight for all and the Devil take the vanquished.

But all this wild demonstration was of joy at the chief's return, for in the half-year of his absence, their foes had twice defeated them in battle.

The chief who ruled in the place of Ululah was at once relegated to his former position, and the uncrowned, savage king was once more crowned as ruler.

The red-skinned man and the four negroes of the schooner's crew were gazed at with wonder amounting to awe, for here came one of a race who had ever been their foes and he had brought back to them their long-lost chief, and his family.

The four negroes were simply scared out of their wits, and could hardly believe their ancestors had been just such a savage race as those they now beheld.

To make matters worse for them, there happened just then to be a feast going on, and there were several fat roasts then on the fire, the same being of human beings, foes captured in a late battle.

Belt also turned in horror from the scene and knew he was among a race of cannibals.

But Ululah in his own language, and amid a deathlike silence, explained all that happened and that the red-skin chief, Belt, had been his rescuer and noblest friend, as had also the crew of his vessel.

He distributed the presents among them and Belt found himself welcomed scarcely less enthusiastically than had been Ululah.

Then the chief told his warriors that the Red Captain, as he called Belt, was to lead them against their foes, with the fire-guns and the sharp swords of the white people, and would strike them a terrible blow, carrying off hundreds as captives to take to a far-away land as slaves.

But he wanted to have a number of his bravest warriors to go upon his vessel with him as a crew, and he would treat them well and make them rich.

That they should know that all was right, Kaloo, his own son, was to go as their chief, and they would sail over the big waters and see many lands.

That night at the council one by one the warriors of the tribe came forward and signified a willingness to go with the Red Captain under their young chief Kaloo, and Belt had the satisfaction of feeling that he would have four-score of as savage black sailors as ever he could desire.

Then other bands were formed for the march upon their foes, and the whole party, with Chief Kalulah at their head, set out for the coast the following night.

The schooner was reached, and the black warriors embarked, when sail was set and the schooner ran to a river leagues below upon the banks of which was the village of the tribe that was to be attacked.

CHAPTER XXII.

A WELL-NAMED CRAFT.

THE slave-schooner entered the river after nightfall, and under easy canvas, with Ululah cut ahead in a canoe with a lantern, held on silently up the stream.

The chief was a good pilot, and his four men paddled just fast enough to keep well ahead of the schooner, the lantern in the stern, with only one slide drawn, being the beacon to guide the vessel on her way.

The wind blew directly up the river, and at a four-knot rate, and it was after midnight before the village came into view.

It was situated upon the slope of a high range of hills, and back from the river only a couple of hundred yards.

It could not be flanked, and there were strong fortifications in the front, of rocks, trees felled and earth.

The village was as silent as a grave, and the boats, lowered some distance below, were filled with the black crew, while the men of the schooner stood at the four small guns with which the vessel was armed, to open fire when their Indian captain gave the word.

It was the intention of Belt to wait until just before dawn, then open a hot fire with the schooner's guns directly upon the village, and, under cover of it to get the Africans ashore to charge the moment the battery ceased firing.

He would then follow with his crew of American negroes armed with muskets and pistols, and the panic would be complete, the victory assured, when as many able-bodied captives as the vessel would hold would at once be seized and sent on board.

Having been fitted out for a slave-ship every convenience was on board for the undertaking, and Belt was very sure of securing fully six hundred slaves for sale in Buber, for he knew that he could find a ready mart there and good prices in gold.

Such was his plan, and he was determined there should be no hitch in the carrying of it out in full.

The schooner accordingly lay off the village until the gray of dawn began to lighten up the eastern horizon, and then a signal was made to Ululah that the schooner was going to open fire, so that he could prepare his warriors for it, as Belt Despard feared he might cause the savage allies he had to stampede, for they were also unused to heavy guns, and, in fact, to firearms of all descriptions.

The signal was answered by Chief Ululah from the shore, and then there came bright red flashes of fire bursting forth from the sides of the schooner, followed by a roar like thunder, while into the African village went tearing the sure messengers of death.

It required all of the influence that Ululah the chief possessed to keep his own warriors from springing from the canoes into the river and flying for their lives, for the howling hail of iron over their heads, added to which was the red glare of the guns and their roar, caused them to crouch and tremble with terror.

How much greater, then, was the horror and fright of the sleeping Africans who had not been prepared for what would occur, but were taken completely by surprise?

The warriors under Chief Ululah had been told just what would occur, and they yet were thrown into almost a panic, while their foes were fairly frightened out of their wits.

Having sent shot after shot into the village, Belt Despard sprung into his boats with his negro crew, armed with muskets and pistols, and landing rushed upon the village.

Chief Ululah and his men followed, and in a few moments they had scaled the barriers and were in the village, for there was no resistance until in the early dawn the cries of their lifelong foes were heard and recognized.

Then there was a rally of the defenders only to be swept down by a volley of musketry from Belt and his men.

Then followed a scene of slaughter that was appalling, for old men and women, young children and infants were struck down without mercy, while the middle-aged and young men and maidens were seized and put in irons as captives.

Only the strong, able-bodied of both sexes were made prisoners, and these were hurried down to the shore by the negro crew and sent on board the schooner as rapidly as the work could be done, while Chief Ululah and his warriors continued their work of death and destruction in the village.

At last the black mate of the Destroyer gave the signal that he had a full cargo of captives, and then only did the slaughter cease and Chief Ululah was urged by Belt Despard to draw off his blood-maddened warriors.

Down to the boats they went, leaving a scene behind them that would appal the stoutest heart that was not in a savage breast, and the foes of Chief Ululah knew that he had struck the blow, that the old enemy they had so feared and had hoped and believed was dead, was alive and more terrible than ever, for he had gained a revenge that should satisfy even his cruel nature.

The sun had risen now and looked down upon a burned and pillaged village, hundreds of dead of all ages and of both sexes, while thousands of others were bowed in grief and terror or were hiding or fleeing for their lives.

The large village of thousands of souls had lost in killed, wounded and captives one-fourth their number, had been overwhelmed and beaten by a small force of a few hundreds, also were now retreating in their war-canoes towed at the stern of the slave-ship which had so well proven her right to the name of the Destroyer.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SLAVE-TRADER.

A SMALL fishing-smack was on its way to Havana some three months after the attack of the Destroyer upon the African village, when it was brought to by a shot from a schooner that ran out of an inlet upon the Cuban coast.

There were three men on the little craft, and they had been congratulating themselves upon having made a large catch of fish, and that a fair wind would soon carry them into port to realize upon their cargo, when the schooner had brought them to by a shot fired over them.

The schooner was flying the Spanish flag, and looked like a vessel-of-war belonging to that nation, but then the fishermen knew that it might be a pirate who would take their fish, burn their boat, and force them into service as seamen.

Their relief was great, then, when the schooner ran near and hailed, asking if they were bound to Havana.

The reply was in the affirmative.

"I will pay you well if you will be the bearer of some papers for me to an official in Havana," was said.

"We will gladly do so, senor," came the answer.

The schooner swept up into the wind, a boat was lowered, and soon after a man boarded the smack.

"I have decided to go myself, my friend, if you can give me passage, and you will make far

more for your services than your cargo of fish will bring you."

"Oh, señor!" cried the delighted Cubans, and then one of the men asked:

"Will you pay us our gold now, señor?"

"No, for I know you Cubans, and you would cut my throat if you thought I had any gold with me."

"Take me to Havana and I will pay you well, and bring me back to my vessel and you shall again receive liberal payment."

The men agreed to this and the smack stood away once more, crowding on full sail, while the schooner put back inshore again.

It was in the morning when the fishing-smack took the passenger on board for Havana, and just before midnight she ran in under the shadows of the frowning Castle of El Moro, and soon after dropped anchor far up the harbor.

"Get your fish ashore, men, and be ready to return with me within a few hours," said the strange passenger, and he walked away upon the errand which had brought him to Havana.

He appeared to know the city, for he made his way through the nearly deserted streets without inquiry, and at last halted at the door of a Spanish inn, where sailors were wont to congregate.

Entering, he found there a motley crowd, drinking and gambling at the tables, and too busy in their occupation to notice him.

Up to a table, apart from the others, he walked, where sat a dark-faced man, the landlord of the *pulperia*, an account-book before him, and piles of money, paid him by the pretty Cuban girls who were the waitresses in the place.

Near him was a bar, where other girls were pouring out wine, or handing over bottles or food as ordered.

"Well, Señor Fuentes, I greet you," said the stranger, quietly taking a seat at the table with the landlord.

The latter started as he heard the voice, glanced into the face of his visitor, and said hoarsely:

"Hal Señor Despard, you are a bold man to venture here."

"I have come for our mutual interest, Señor Fuentes, so would have a private word with you," was the answer.

"Well, drink a bottle of port with me, for there are eyes upon us as sharp as eagles."

"Then I will show you to your room."

"Come, Rita, a bottle of port."

"Yes, and your best, fair Rita, for I wish no common wine at the landlord's expense."

The girl addressed as Rita smiled at the stranger with a low "*Gracias*, señor," as she pocketed a piece of silver handed to her by the stranger, and departed upon her errand.

The wine was good, for the stranger said nothing against it, and having tossed it off, the visitor said:

"I am half-asleep, Señor Fuentes, so show me my room."

The landlord left Rita at his table to make change, and take pay, and taking up a taper from a shelf, lighted it and said:

"Come, señor, I will show you your room."

The room he led him to was a far pleasanter one than the place indicated it possessed within its walls, and the windows commanded a view of the harbor.

"Come, Señor Despard, tell me how it is that I find you in Havana, for I am eager to know, as Captain Ricardo told me when last I saw him that you had deserted from his vessel?"

"Yes, Señor Fuentes, I got tired of being a pirate officer and so left the buccaneering trade."

"And what are you doing now?"

"I am in a business less hazardous, a trifle less dishonest and which pays better."

"Indeed!" said the landlord with a sneer.

"Yes."

"And what business is it, may I ask?"

"I am in the slave trade, my dear Señor Fuentes."

"Ah! good!" and the eyes of the landlord sparkled with pleasure.

"Yes, I preferred to be my own captain, señor."

"And you are?"

"I am, and command as fleet and fine a craft as floats."

"So intend to go into the slave trade?"

"I have already done so, Señor Fuentes, for I have half a thousand able-bodied and young slaves for you to purchase of me."

"*Caramba!*" and with this exclamation Señor Fuentes sprang to his feet and warmly grasped the hand of the slaver.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BARGAIN.

THAT his announcement to Señor Fuentes was received with great pleasure Belt Despard noticed at a glance, though he did not appear to observe it.

He had, when in the pirate craft of Ricardo the Rover, been the one to dispose of the booty and draw the money for it, and Fuentes had been the man who made the sales of the plunder and paid over the money.

Thus the two had become well acquainted.

To the credit of Belt Despard be it said, he had always acted honestly toward his captain, upon the principle of honor among thieves, I suppose, and this Ricardo had afterward discovered when he had to make his own deals with the Spanish landlord in Havana.

He had always had an idea that Fuentes knew something of the whereabouts of Belt, and the landlord had always suspected foul play toward the Indian officer on the part of Ricardo, who, captured with his vessel some time before the visit of Despard to Havana as a slaver, had been hanged at the yard-arm of an American cruiser.

"Well, well, Señor Captain Despard, I am more than glad to see you, and to learn the news you bring, for somehow I always feared Ricardo was jealous of you and had done away with you, only saying that you had deserted to cover up his tracks."

"No, he was never other than a good friend to me, only I got tired of having a master, and, being a pirate, so sought a vessel of my own."

"And you have one?"

"I have."

"Where is she?"

"Not very many leagues from Havana, hiding in a retreat along the coast."

"Good!"

"And you have been to Africa?"

"I am just back, señor."

"With a cargo of slaves?"

"Yes."

"Good ones?"

"The best."

"That is what all the traders say."

"It may be; but I have taken good care of my captives, for I have had a crew large enough to control them, so did not keep them so much below decks, and was careful to keep them well fed, giving them plenty of water."

"So lost hardly over half your cargo?"

"I did not lose but one-fifth."

"Good!"

"How many did you sail with?"

"Six hundred."

"And you have about four hundred now?"

"I have five hundred."

"Young and strong?"

"Their ages range from twelve to forty years, and these are about half of them women."

"Good again!"

"You deal in slaves?"

"Of course I do."

"And wish the cargo?"

"Yes, and as many more as you will bring."

"Well, let us see what this cargo is worth to me first."

"How much do you wish per head?"

"I do not know."

"How much to lump the cargo?"

"I only know that good, able-bodied Africans are in demand here, and I have an idea that they bring about five hundred pesos each."

"You are mistaken, señor, for three hundred would be a large price for them."

"Indeed?"

"They are not acclimated, you know, señor, many of them though seemingly well now will die when landed, and others will drop off from homesickness and worry."

"What will you give me for the lot, señor?"

"Two hundred apiece and take all chances."

"I risked my life, and the lives of my faithful crew, Señor Fuentes, not to speak of my vessel, to get these people, whom I have had to feed at my own expense and nurse as carefully as though they were children."

"It has been months of danger, hard work and a slaughter that was terrible to get this human cargo, and if you want them you must pay me cash three hundred pesos each, or I go to another market for them."

"But, Señor Despard, there is no demand for them just now."

"Don't tell what is false, Fuentes, for I saw your expression of delight when I told you I had a cargo of blacks, and you also said you would take all I would bring."

"We will make it cash two hundred and fifty for each one, Señor Captain."

"You have my price, Señor Fuentes."

"But I can not realize but a few dollars over three hundred."

"You can readily get fifty over I feel certain, and without risk can make a handsome sum on your purchase."

"We will split it at two seventy-five."

"We will not trade, Señor Fuentes, so I bid you *adios*."

"No, no, Señor Captain, I will give you your price, though it is too much; but, then, we are old friends and can do a great deal of business together, I am sure, in the future."

"Where are they to be delivered?"

"On the south coast of Cuba, at the plantation of Don Sebastian Rivas."

"I will deliver them there."

"I will send a pilot with you and give you a note to the Don, who will inspect the cargo and hand you the draft for them."

"All right, señor."

"Now let us have a bottle of your best wine together, for I wish to talk with you."

"It is closing time, captain, so I will go down and clear out the *salon*, after which I will be

very much at your service," and the landlord left the room, while Belt Despard began to pace to and fro and muse aloud.

"Four hundred at three hundred pesos each will bring me one hundred and twenty thousand dollars, about."

"That is not enough, for I need more than double that sum."

"I will use this in purchasing a plantation and slaves in Cuba, and another cargo will make me rich enough to have my fortune tempt that woman to become my wife."

"If she refuses, then the slave trade will be too tame an existence for me and I will turn to piracy — yes, the Destroyer shall then hoist the black flag," and he spoke with bitter vehemence as he uttered the last words.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE COMPACT.

WHEN Landlord Fuentes returned with his bottle of wine he found his visitor pacing the floor in deepest reverie.

"Well, señor, I have closed out the people, so come to join you in that bottle of wine, after which you must seek rest, for you need it."

"I wish to ask you, Señor Fuentes, if you know of a plantation home I can purchase?"

"At what price, señor?"

"I care not for the price, for I wish the best, a palace, if one can be bought here."

"Don Rivas has a superb home on the coast, señor, one fit for a prince to dwell in."

"The one where I am to deliver the slaves?"

"Oh, no, Señor Captain, for this one is not many leagues from Havana, and on the north shore."

"He won the place at cards from the former governor-general, and though it is not very extensive in acres, it yet has a grand villa and surroundings, with perhaps forty slaves attached to it, for it was the governor's retreat."

"What can it be bought for, Señor Fuentes?"

"I think a hundred thousand pesos will buy it, señor."

"Well, I will speak to the Don about it, and let him hold back its price out of the purchase money for the slaves."

"Now, I wish you to dispatch a lugger to the place where I land the slaves, with a year's stores for three hundred people, and other things I will give you a list of, for I have to refit and provision my vessel for this second run to Africa."

"Yes, señor."

"The value of the stores and whatever you purchase, with the charter money for the lugger, I will also deduct from the amount received for the slaves."

"It will be satisfactory, Captain Despard."

"When I see the Don I will find out all about his villa, and if possible run back and take a look at it, though from your description of it I have not the slightest doubt of its being all that I desire."

"Now I will seek a few hours' rest, señor, for I must return to my vessel at once, and please have your pilot ready to go with me."

"I will, Señor Captain, but how did you come to Havana?"

"In a fishing smack which will be ready to put to sea again by noon, for the crew are discharging the cargo now."

The landlord now bade his guest good-night, and throwing himself upon the bed, Belt Despard almost instantly sunk into a deep slumber.

He was awakened an hour before noon by Señor Fuentes, who had a tempting breakfast ready for him, and told him that the pilot awaited his pleasure.

The man was a Cuban Indian, one of a race seldom seen nowadays, and knew the West Indian waters perfectly.

He went with Belt Despard to where the smack was moored, and found the crew awaiting them, the little craft having been put in the best of trim in anticipation of a liberal fee being paid for their services.

Going on board sail was gotten up quickly and running out of the harbor the fishing-smack, under a steady, eight-knot breeze put into the inlet where the schooner was awaiting her return soon after nightfall.

The men received their fee, with many expressions of gratitude at the generosity of the Indian captain, and the schooner at once got under way and headed for the home of Don Sebastian Rivas on the northern coast of the island.

That Belt Despard had been as kind as was possible to the poor wretches, whom he had so cruelly dragged from their homes amid the horrors of a battle in which they had seen their kin slain, there was no doubt.

He had allowed them on deck both day and night when he could do so, had allowed some of the women to go free and bring water and food to the others and had fed them well.

They had not been kept in irons after the first few days out, so that the death rate had been small among them and the Indian captain felt certain he would turn over to the Don as fine a lot of African slaves as had ever been brought to the West Indies.

The run around the island to the northern coast was a rapid one, the schooner making fine headway, and the pilot telling Captain Despard

to keep a bright lookout for Spanish, English and American cruisers, which were constantly seen in those waters.

The pilot so timed the run as to reach the rendezvous by night, and when a league off the coast had certain lights set as signals.

After awhile the signals were answered from the shore, and the schooner headed in.

"Those signals tell us that no cruiser has been seen off-shore to-day, Senor Captain, and all is safe to go in," said the pilot.

The schooner was met as she dropped anchor by a messenger from the Don, and Belt at once accompanied him to the Spaniard's home.

Fuentes had hinted that the Don was a Spanish noble who having lost his vast estates took various methods of recuperating his fallen fortune, for he was a gambler, and went into certain speculations that were of a treasonable and dishonorable nature, though he was never suspected of being guilty of any off-color acts.

He passed a part of his time at his plantation, and here he acted decoy for Fuentes in his slave-trading operations.

He greeted the Indian captain cordially, and having read the letter from Senor Fuentes, said at once that he was ready to pay for the cargo of slaves, and also to dispose of his place on the northern coast, and which place Belt came to the conclusion, though nominally belonging to the Don, was in reality the property of the landlord.

That night the unfortunate slaves were landed from the schooner, and were taken up into the mountains, there to await the distribution which their masters would make of them.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A SECOND CRUISE.

WHATEVER Don Sebastian Rivas might think of Captain Despard, he certainly treated him with distinguished consideration, treating him as an honored guest at his home.

He asked him many questions about his cruise, all of which Belt guardedly answered, and was surprised to know that he had a crew composed wholly of blacks.

"Do you find them faithful, Senor Captain?" asked the Don.

"They are steel, senor."

"But would they fight if you were forced to defend your ship?"

"Like demons."

"Are they good sailors?"

"There are none better, senor."

"And they are obedient and willing?"

"Perfectly."

"You surprise me, senor, and I have a curiosity to see them, I assure you."

"You can do so to-morrow, Don Rivas, if you wish; but now to this place of yours?"

"Ah, yes, this place of mine is a pleasant home, where I find it most convenient to spend a few months in the year to recuperate, senor."

"I refer to your villa on the northern shore."

"Ah, yes; that home of—mine."

"You wish to buy it, Senor Fuentes writes me?"

"I do, and you are to name your lowest price and take the sum out of the amount due me for the slaves."

"I see—I understand."

"And I should have a lugger with stores here within a couple of days, and the value of her cargo and the charter will also be deducted from my money."

"I understand, senor; but I hope you do not intend to refit your vessel here, for a cruiser may come into the little harbor at any time?" and the Don seemed alarmed.

"Oh, no, senor. I know of a safe retreat for refitting and I shall sail for it at once the lugger's stores arrive, and when refitted, I will take a look at your villa and return to make my report."

"I believe you are also to make another run to the African coast, Captain Despard?"

"Yes, for I need more gold than I thus far have become possessor of, as I have a project in my mind which I am determined to carry out."

Having nothing to detain him longer in the harbor, and seeing that the Don was anxious for him to leave, fearing the arrival of a cruiser, Captain Despard at once put to sea and under the pilotage of the Cuban Indian ran for the house which Senor Fuentes had spoken of as belonging to the Spanish noble, and which he had won in a game of cards from the governor-general.

The approach to the harbor which the villa overlooked was a dangerous one, but once within the land-locked basin it was a very safe anchorage.

The villa was delightfully located and all that could be desired for a home of luxury, as nothing had been left undone in making it perfection.

Belt was more than pleased with the place, wandered over the grounds, visited the quarters of the slaves and found that there was nothing to be desired, so he at once decided that it should be his.

Running back to the Don's home he found there the lugger with the stores, and in it had come Landlord Fuentes, and he was then up at the mansion, whither Despard went.

"Well, Senor Fuentes, this is an unexpected pleasure, to find you here," he said.

"I often visit my dear friend, Don Rivas, Senor Captain, and took advantage of the lugger's coming to do so."

"But your stores are all here for you."

"Yes, and I thank you; but I have been to your home on the north coast, Landlord Fuentes."

"Don Sebastian's home, you mean, senor."

"Well, I have been to the villa, whoever it may belong to."

"And you like it?"

"It is just what I wish, so I will take it."

"Well, Captain Despard, you could not do better, for it is just the place to play the gentleman in, and you can live like a prince if you have the gold to back up your extravagance."

"I have but little left, after buying the house and paying for these stores, owing to your greed, Fuentes, for these slaves go to you fifty pesos each less than you should pay me for them."

"Oh, senor!"

"It is true; but if you wish more you must give me four hundred pesos for every man, woman and child I land you here on my return."

"It is extortion, Senor Captain, to ask it."

"Very well, I will seek a market for them elsewhere."

"I will call it three hundred and sixty, senor."

"Say three hundred and seventy-five, and I close the bargain."

"What do you say, Don Rivas?"

"Accept the terms."

"All right, Captain Despard."

"Put it in writing."

"Is it necessary?"

"Yes, for I am not going to risk life and vessel simply to enrich you."

"You are a cunning dog, Fuentes, as I know; but you are a very rich man, and I happen to know that you are leading a double life, for you are Landlord Fuentes in one character, and a wealthy Spaniard in playing another, and you, not Don Rivas, won that place over a game of cards with the governor-general."

"But, that is not my affair, so long as you keep faith with me."

"Now, what do I owe you?"

Senor Fuentes saw that he had a fearless, dangerous man to deal with, so he made no denials, no excuses, but figured up the amount of the stores, the charter of the lugger and the amount for the villa, and handed it to Belt Despard with the written order for a cargo of slaves at the price agreed upon.

"I see by this that I owe you out of the money coming to me all but fifteen thousand pesos of the amount I receive for my cargo, so hand me that sum, Senor Fuentes, and I beg you to keep the present overseer in charge of the villa until my return."

"Now I will get the stores on board the schooner and set sail for a place to refit for my run to Africa; but expect me back again within six months at the furthest."

A few hours after the schooner was leaving the island of Cuba astern, bound upon another voyage to the African coast.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE RETURN OF THE DESTROYER.

BELT DESPARD had not sought the lagoon on the Mexican Gulf to refit, as it would carry him out of his course considerably, and he was anxious to get back with his human cargo as soon as possible.

He had planned well for the future, and he intended that nothing should stand in the way of his successfully carrying out his intentions.

He had read Fuentes pretty thoroughly, and the Indian pilot had given him some points about the landlord, for the two had been drawn together like brothers, perhaps because both had Indian blood in their veins.

As Fuentes did not know that the Indian Pilot Zekil was aware of the double life he led, he did not understand just how Belt Despard had suspected him.

But it was nevertheless the truth, that the landlord of the Spanish Inn in Havana, was, when he so pleased, under an assumed name and disguise, received in the best society of Cuba, for he spent his money lavishly to gain his ends.

He was known only as a rich planter who dwelt on the southern coast, and the intimate friend of Don Sebastian Rivas whose blue blood no one could doubt.

By good guessing, being an excellent reader of human nature, and what he had picked up from Zekil the pilot, Despard had pretty well discovered all he cared to know about Landlord Fuentes, who, as the disposer of pirate plunder had made a very large fortune.

The Indian pilot ran the schooner to a secure retreat on one of the islands of the West Indies, and there she was quickly put in trim for her long run to the African coast and back.

In the time that he had had his savage crew, Belt Despard had made the best of sailors of them.

He had won their confidence completely, and

having made their young chief Kaloo his first-officer, he held them under complete subjection, while they were delighted with the new life they led.

The crew of American negroes were the ones who held the petty officers' berths, and so there was no rivalry aboard the schooner.

Of course Belt Despard determined to give his crew a chance to again see their kindred, and he well knew that the only way to get another cargo of slaves would be to make a second attack upon the foes of the savages he had under him as sailors.

Kaloo was delighted at the prospect of striking another blow at their foes, and said that his father would be also.

In getting his stores for the schooner Belt Despard had wisely put down on his list, for Fuentes to purchase a large supply of presents for the savage tribe in Africa which had become his allies, and the chief and his wife were particularly remembered.

After a long voyage, for the winds were baffling when fair, and they had to encounter a number of storms, the schooner at last ran into the stream on the banks of which was the village of the tribe of Chief Ululah.

The boats were gotten out ahead, and the schooner was towed up to a secure retreat, when, at dawn, Belt, Kaloo and the savage crew in their war-canoes, which had been stowed on the vessel, moved on up toward the village.

They were seen as soon as dawn broke, and, supposed to be an attacking force, Ululah assembled his hosts to meet them, when a signal was given by Kaloo, recognition followed, and the welcome extended to the savage sailors and their Indian captain was unbounded.

Belt Despard distributed the presents, and when he proposed another expedition against their foes, Chief Ululah and his warriors were only too happy to join him, for they had lately met with a severe handling at the hands of these same enemies.

To describe the second expedition would but be a repetition of the first, for it was but another night surprise, or panic, a terrible slaughter and capture of hundreds of prisoners, men, women and children, that destroyed forever the power of the once mighty tribe of blacks, and caused the Chief Ululah and his people to be regarded with far greater fear than ever before.

The Destroyer, after a short delay in the river on which Ululah's village was situated, again set sail across the seas, bearing beneath her decks a far greater number than had been carried before of unfortunate captives.

Belt Despard was becoming avaricious, his greed for gold outweighing his caution.

But he was favored with fair weather, gave his captives daily and nightly outings upon deck, fed them well, and considered himself fortunate that he only had a hundred burials at sea, from the time of dropping the African Coast out of sight astern, and sighting the Island of Cuba at the end of the run.

His sympathy was not with the dead wretches cast into the sea, but with his own loss of gold by losing them.

The schooner ran into the Don's harbor by night, under the pilotage of Zekil, the Indian, and the blacks were at once landed, and secretly run off to the retreat in the mountains, while Belt Despard once more became the guest of Don Rivas.

"Now, Don Rivas, I have a little business to transact with you, if you will allow me a hearing?" said Despard.

"Certainly, Senor Captain."

"As I understand it you are an adventurer, a noble of the highest rank it is true, but with no fortune left of your own, and under the pay of Senor Fuentes?"

"Senor?" was the indignant exclamation of Don Sebastian.

"Do not get angry, my dear Don, for I mean to be your friend, to pay you liberally for slight services I desire you to render me, and which I desire now to make known to you, as soon as you have given me the order on Senor Fuentes for just one hundred and eighty-seven thousand five hundred dollars for slaves delivered into your keeping, and which order I shall present in person," said the Indian captain blandly.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A COMPACT BETWEEN THEM.

IF Don Sebastian felt insulted at the very plain way in which the Indian captain had said he was an adventurer, he smothered his indignation when he learned that he was to receive a salvo for his wounded feelings in the shape of gold.

"I will give you the order, Senor Captain, on Senor Fuentes, for the amount named, and assure him, that with very few exceptions, the slaves are as fine a lot as I ever saw," said the Don.

Turning to his desk he wrote the order and after carefully reading it over, Belt said:

"Now, my dear Don Sebastian, what kind of a Moor do you think I would make?"

"A Moor, senor?"

"So I asked."

"Well, strange to say you remind me of the Moors, for when in the Spanish Navy as a midshipman I saw many of them."

"I have been told so before, Don Rivas, that I was strangely like a Moor, and when a boy I passed a year in that country as a captive, so speak their language passably well, while you know I am not a bad hand with Spanish, and altogether not ill-looking?"

"You speak Spanish fluently, señor, and permit me to say you are a very striking looking man, a very handsome man indeed."

"Thank you, Don Rivas, but now that you think I can pass as a Moor I intend to play the part of one."

"For what reason, señor?"

"Well, it is my fancy to do so."

"A strange fancy."

"No."

"I see no motive."

"I do."

"Nothing to be gained by it."

"Let me explain."

"With pleasure."

"You have, for instance, a wealthy Moor friend who is fond of travel."

"I, señor?"

"Yes, Don Rivas."

"But I do not—"

"This friend takes a fancy to come to the Americas on a cruise in his own vessel, with a crew of his own, see?"

"No, I do not see, señor."

"He writes you of his intention and you spread the news about, so that his coming will be looked forward to with curiosity."

"But, señor, I—"

"Well, at last he arrives, you welcome him, and he desires to purchase your villa, for we will call it yours."

"Ah, señor!"

"It is mine, you know, but no one knows that you have sold it, for all believe it to be yours."

"He purchases this place and begins to live a life of luxury there, don't you see, and you present your Moorish friend, Selim Ben Alvah, to the governor-general, and into the best circles of Cuban society—see?"

"But, señor, I—"

"This wealthy Moorish gentleman, Selim Ben Alvah, spends his gold freely, you are often his guest, and there can be a romantic story of his having saved your life when you were a midshipman in the Spanish Navy years ago, and thus a strong tie will exist between you."

"This Moor will live in Cuba, and cruise at will about the seas, and should he be so successful as to bring back with him a fair American lady as his bride, and whom he now devotedly loves, then all will be well."

"Should he fail in this good intention of his, then all may not go so well with him, though you will not suffer from having befriended him."

"Do you understand, Don Sebastian Rivas?"

"I think I grasp your meaning now, Señor Captain."

"I am glad, for I wish you to do so, and the more readily you grasp it the more it will be worth to you."

"You expect me to give out that a wealthy Moorish friend of mine, Captain Selim Ben Alvah, is coming to Cuba?"

"Exactly."

"He is to nominally purchase the home you now own?"

"Yes."

"He is to come in his own yacht?"

"He will do so."

"And I am to present him in society as his friend?"

"You are."

"For which I am to be liberally paid?"

"Yes."

"You are to be the Moor?"

"I am."

"What is to be my pay?"

"Five thousand in hand now, and ten thousand more when I arrive as * Rais Selim Ben Alvah."

"Make it double that amount and it is a bargain, señor."

"You introduced Fuentes into society?"

"Yes, señor."

"What is the name he bears as a gentleman?"

"As you appear to know all about it I will tell you that he is supposed to be a rich Peruvian, Don Jose Huascar."

"Well, I can arrange to have this rich Peruvian gentleman, Don Jose Huascar, alias Fuentes, landlord of a Spanish wine-house, introduce me for just half the sum I offer you."

"No, señor, I will do it for the terms you offer," said the Spaniard quickly.

"All right, then it is a compact between us?"

"Yes, señor."

"Write out the compact and I will pay you your first money now, for I have it with me."

Don Sebastian obeyed and received the money, after which the two spent a couple of hours arranging their plans for the future.

"When do you expect to arrive, señor?"

"Say within three months, for I desire to go to a retreat I have and fully prepare for the part I have to play."

* Captain.

"It will be well to do so, señor."

"But about your costume, and—"

"Fortunately, I picked up, adrift at sea, a Moorish vessel off the African Coast."

"I took her cargo, which was valuable and just what I needed, then rigged her with jury-masts and let her crew go on their way, for she was swept clean of masts and spars."

"These things I have on my vessel, and I thus formed the idea of playing the Moor."

"Now, Don Sebastian, I will say farewell with the hope that you will soon welcome Rais Selim Ben Alvah in Havana."

The Don escorted his guest to the shore, and stood watching his departing vessel until she faded from view, when he muttered to himself:

"That is a very remarkable man."

CHAPTER XXIX.

LAURITA.

THE destination of the schooner, after leaving the coast of Cuba, was to the lagoon not very far from the entrance to Mobile Bay.

Captain Despard timed his arrival there so as to run in under cover of the darkness, for he did not care to be seen by any craft, or the people at the light-house on the point, going in toward the shore as though to make a landing.

The Destroyer was too suspicious a looking vessel not to be at once suspected of being up to some deviltry.

The boats were gotten out ahead, when the schooner had crossed the lagoon, and the slave-ship was turned into the narrow creek where she had before been so securely hidden.

Where she came to an anchor the land rose on one side to a bluff, and upon the summit was a natural park of live-oak trees, the very spot for an encampment.

Captain Despard had his men ashore at early dawn, and old canvas was made into tents for them, while the schooner was fairly stripped of everything on board.

Just above her lay the lugger, just where she had been left nearly a year before, and going on board of her, Despard looked at the craft with real affection in his glance.

"You were the founder of my fortunes, good old vessel, for, but for having purchased you, never would I have met her."

"Now, old craft, you must serve me again, for we go back to our old stamping-ground together as soon as you can be fitted for sea."

So saying he set the crew to work getting out the sails from the cabin and bending them on, and soon had the lugger ready to sail.

The savage crew of the schooner were to remain ashore working on their vessel, while their captain with but half a dozen of his old sailors was to make the run in the lugger to New Orleans.

The next night the lugger ran out into the Gulf and headed for the mouth of the Mississippi River.

It was night when she dropped anchor off the city of New Orleans, looking just like the honest coaster she had been up to the meeting with Lucille Revello.

Going ashore, Despard sought a sailor's inn where he had been in the habit of stopping when in port, and the greeting he met with from the landlord showed that he had ever been a welcome guest.

"Why, it does my eyes good to see you, Belt, and my hand itches with pleasure to grasp your own once more, for we have all mourned you as dead, indeed we did, *amigo*," said the landlord.

"Well, Señor Antonio, I am glad to get home once more, and to tell you the truth, I never expected to do so until lately."

"Why, where have you been, for poor Laurita has nearly cried her eyes out about your long absence."

"She supposed you had been captured by pirates?"

"That is just it, Antonio, I was captured by pirate, and only saved my life and vessel by taking a cargo for them around to Panama, and there I was detained for a long while, but at last managed to escape."

"So you have been around the Horn, have you, Belt; well, you are indeed a deep-water sailor to have done that."

"Yes," said Despard, who, having begun to falsify as suited his humor, intended to cover his tracks with other lies.

"Well, you must come in and see Laurita, for she will be delighted to see you," and Antonio led the man toward his own quarters in the tavern.

"I was a fool to come here, for something tells me that it will bring me trouble," muttered Despard as he followed the Spaniard to his own little parlor.

Seated there, idly running her hands over the strings of a guitar, was a young girl with a darkly bronzed face, but one that was tinted with the rich hue of health, her complexion being perfect.

Her eyes were large, dreamy, and the intensest passion lurked in their depths, while her teeth were like pearls, even and small, a pretty contrast to her full, blood-red lips.

Her form was slender, graceful and of perfect mold, while her costume was half Spanish, half American.

About eighteen years of age, she was a girl of rarest fascinations, her voice being rich and full of music.

Such was Laurita, the daughter of Antonio Paz, and there was not a man of her acquaintance who had not at once gone into ecstasies over her beauty and longed to win and wear a gem so lovely.

She had, several years before, been crossing the river with her father and mother in a small boat, returning from a visit to a friend, when a vessel had run them down in mid-stream.

The boat had been crushed to atoms, but a loud voice from a lugger lying at anchor near had shouted to them:

"Quick! jump into the river!"

"For your lives, jump clear of the boat!"

The father and daughter had obeyed, the mother hesitated, and the next instant the sharp bows of the ship crashed into the boat, and the poor woman was never seen again.

The one who had thus sharply commanded them to leap from the boat had sprung from the lugger as he did so, and ere Laurita had sunk a second time he held her in his strong grasp, when he also upheld her father, who was but an indifferent swimmer, until a boat came off from the lugger for them.

The rescuer was Belt Despard, and from that day the inn of Antonio Paz had been his home whenever he was in port, and many said that the dark eyes of the lovely Spanish girl had won the love of the handsome Indian captain.

CHAPTER XXX.

A JEALOUS LADY-LOVE.

FROM the day of her rescue by Belt Despard, Laurita Paz had loved the young Indian with her whole soul.

That he had African blood in his veins neither she or her father ever suspected, and in fact very few did with whom he came in contact.

That Belt Despard was drawn toward the young Spanish girl there was no doubt, and, but for his having met Lucille Revello he would have married her.

But the mysterious woman, who had chartered his lugger to bear herself, her son and slaves to a home on the shores of Mobile Bay, had completely won the Indian sailor from his allegiance to Laurita.

When her father entered the pretty, cozy sitting-room where his daughter was seated, Belt hung back in the rear, and was not seen by the maiden, when Antonio said:

"Stop singing that sad love-song, Laurie, about being left forlorn, for I have good news for you."

"Has Belt returned father?" and the guitar was thrown aside as she sprung to her feet in an instant.

"I will answer the question myself, señorita," and Belt stepped forward, while her father quickly turned and retraced his way to his saloon.

With a glad cry Laurita sprung toward her lover, but as quickly checked herself.

Something in his look and manner had caught her eye and ear.

Her jealousy was aroused in an instant, for he had called her señorita, and not Laurita as was his wont.

Then too he had not reached forward to clasp her in his arms.

"You receive me coldly, señorita?" he said, piqued at her manner.

"It is you, Señor Captain, who are cold, and I would ask where you have been all these long months, now a year since we last met?"

"I was captured by pirates, pressed into service and sent around the Horn to Panama with a cargo."

"I escaped, and robbed of everything, worked my way back with my lugger by carrying cargoes from port to port."

"This is then the welcome I receive?"

"Forgive me, Belt," and springing forward now she threw her arms about his neck and pressed her red lips to his with all the ardor of her passionate nature.

Of course Belt was persuaded to stay to dinner, and the two talked over many things, for the man was already pledged to make her his wife.

Having begun by telling a falsehood he still covered up his tracks with others, and the young girl appeared not to doubt him in the least.

But in her heart she did do so, and she was determined to know the truth.

She had incidentally asked about the lugger, where she lay at anchor, and if his crew had returned with him, and she determined to know if all was as he had said it was, for that first look and word still haunted her.

So Belt remained to dinner, and, as was his wont in the past, stepped out into the pretty garden in the for rear his *siesta* in the hammock, a common custom with the people in the far South.

He seemed strangely drowsy during the meal, Antonio Paz thought, but he set it down to his

loss of rest in coming into port, and the wine, for they had partaken freely.

When Antonio returned to his saloon, Laurita sprang to her feet on the instant the door closed behind him.

"The powder I put in Belt's wine will keep him asleep for hours and I will know the truth," she said.

Hastily she went to her own room, and half an hour after there emerged therefrom a dashing-looking youth clad in the uniform of a midshipman in the United States Navy.

He slipped out into the garden, took a glance at the Indian sailor sleeping in the hammock, and letting himself out by the gate in the wall with a key he took from his pocket, hastened on down the side street which he came out upon toward the river shores.

Off the lower part of the city he saw a vessel lying at anchor, which he appeared to recognize, and calling a boatman he sprung in and ordered him to row out to the craft.

Boarding, he beheld half a dozen negroes on the deck, one of whom was in charge.

"Where is your captain, my man?" he asked.

"Ashore, sah."

"Who has charge here?"

"I am mate, sah."

"Come into the cabin then, for I am a Government officer, and wish a talk with you."

The negro obeyed, but was evidently alarmed.

Taking a seat, the young midshipman glanced about him curiously, and then asked:

"When did you arrive in port?"

"Last night, sah."

"Where from?"

"We has been tradin', sah, along the coast."

"What coast?"

"The Gulf Coast, sah, between here and Pensacola."

"When were you last in this port?"

"We hain't been here for a year, sah."

"Where have you been?"

"Tradin', sah."

"Were you not captured by a pirate?"

"Lordy! no, sah, or we'd have all been kilt."

"Has your captain been with you all the while?"

"Yes, sah."

"What is his name?"

"Captain Belt Despard, sah."

"Is he a Spaniard?"

"Well, no sah, he's an Indian, or, leastwise, most of him is Indian, and he has considerable white and some little black blood in him, I have heard."

The midshipman started, sprung to his feet, and took several turns quickly across the cabin.

At last he said, and his voice quivered:

"See here, my man: I am a Government officer, and if you do not tell me the truth, I'll take you on board of my vessel—you saw her anchored above you there—the frigate, and hang you to the yard-arm."

"Now will you tell me the truth, or not?"

"I'll talk, cap'n, until I blisters my tongue, if you says so," was the eager response of the negro mate of the lugger.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE MIDSHIPMAN.

THE negro mate of the lugger was terribly alarmed at this threat of the young officer.

He might be a mere youth in years, but he wore a uniform which the crew all stood in great awe of, especially since they had been engaged in the nefarious slave-trade.

So when the young officer made his threat, he found that it had the desired effect to frighten the man into subjection.

"Now, my man, tell me the truth."

"Every time, sah."

"Where have you just come from with this lugger?"

"A retreat, sah, on the Gulf Coast."

"What have you been doing in the craft?"

"Nothing, sah, for she been layin' thar ever since we left here a year ago."

"Idle?"

"Yes, sah."

"When you left port, where did you go?"

"To Mobile Bay, sah."

"What with?"

"A cargo."

"What kind of a cargo?"

"A lady was moving, sah, with her furniture and slaves."

"A lady?"

"Yes, sah."

"A young lady?"

"Yes, sah."

"Pretty?"

"She was lovely, sah."

"Her father and mother were with her?"

"No, sah; she didn't have any I seen."

The young midshipman again took a turn across the cabin.

"And she moved from this city?"

"Yes, sah."

"To Mobile?"

"No, sah."

"You just said you took her to Mobile."

"Yes, sah, to Mobile Bay, for she went to a house there."

"Ah! and then?"

"We left her there, sah."

"And then?"

"We went to the lagoon and left the lugger."

"Why did you do this?"

The negro was silent, and the midshipman said again:

"Why did you do this?"

"Well, sah, yer see we picked up a craft adrift."

"Ah, you turned smugglers?"

"Oh, Lordy, no, sah."

"What then?"

"We picked up a craft adrift, sah."

"Deserted?"

"Yes, sah."

"And then?"

"The cap'n he took her to the lagoon."

"What for?"

"He fitted her up, sah."

"Why?"

"Waal, sah, he thought he would go into the West Indian trade, seeing as how he had a better craft than the lugger."

"And where did you go?"

"To Cuba, sah."

"And then?"

The negro was silent, and the question was repeated, so the answer came at last:

"Well, sah, the cap'n jist traded round and made a little money, so he could buy him a home in Cuba."

"And he did so?"

"Yes, sah."

"He bought him a home there?"

"Yes, sah, a plantation."

"And then?"

"Then he took the schooner to the lagoon to fit her up, sah, while he came here in the lugger for stores and what he needed for the vessel."

"I see; and his schooner is now being fitted up?"

"Yes, sah."

"You are sure you were not pirating in the schooner?"

"Oh, Lordy, no, sah, the cap'n's an honest man."

"Well, now tell me why he bought that house in Cuba?"

After some hesitation the negro mate answered with a cunning smile:

"I guesses he's goin' to git married, sah."

"Get married?" and the face of the middy flushed crimson.

"Yes, sah, I guesses so, though I doesn't know."

"Is the lady in New Orleans?"

"No, sah."

"Who is she?"

"I don't know for sart'in, sah, but I guesses it are ther lady he moved over on Mobile Bay shore."

Again the midshipman seemed deeply moved, and it was some time before he spoke.

At last he said, and his voice was hoarse and quivering:

"You are sure of this?"

"No, sah, I only thinks so."

"You think that he will marry that young lady?"

"Yes, sah."

"Why do you think so?"

"Well, sah, he seemed like a different man after he met her."

"In what way?"

"Before he met her, sah, he was not ashamed of having negro blood in his veins; but afterwards he would not admit it."

"Then we had to all call him captain, and he was as proud as a navy officer, begging your pardon, sah."

"And unkind to you all?"

"Oh, no, sah, he was never that; but it did seem that he loved the lady and wanted to make her love him."

"Did she?"

"I dunno, sah; but she thought a heap of him."

"Well, my man, you are still sure he did not turn pirate or smuggler?"

"No, indeed, sah."

"Then that was not the way he got his money?"

"No, sah, he made it selling his cargoes."

"You have answered me well, my man, so here is a golden eagle for you."

"Oh, thankee, sah."

"But now tell me when the lugger sails?"

"Soon as Cap'n Belt gits his stores, sah."

"In a week say?"

"Yes, sah."

"Well, do not tell your captain I have been here, for I find that this was not the lugger I was after."

"I'm glad, sah."

"No, your vessel is all right and I must look elsewhere for the craft I am in search of."

"Now remember, do not tell your captain I was here," and so saying the midshipman left the lugger, to the great delight of Mate Nick, who clinched his golden eagle in his hand and half-danced a jig when he saw the boat row away.

Paying the boatman when he landed, the midshipman hastened back to the gate leading into the garden of the home of Antonio Paz.

Letting himself in with his key he rapidly made his way through the shrubbery to the house, and slipped into the room where Laurita had disappeared.

Not very long after the door opened and Laurita came forth.

She was very pale but calm, and taking up her guitar walked out into the garden.

There, still sleeping in the hammock, lay the handsome Red-skin Rover, all unconscious of what had been going on all about him.

"He is still asleep, but I will arouse him," she muttered, and she ran her fingers over the guitar strings and began to sing.

But he slept serenely through her song, and rising, she shook him somewhat roughly.

"Come, Senor Captain, you are not gallant to sleep for hours when you visit a lady," she said.

He awoke sluggishly, aroused himself, then stood up and tottered, while he said:

"What a severe pain I have in my head."

"How long have I slept, senorita, for I have to ask your pardon?"

"You have slept just three hours, senor," was the cold response of the girl, though a smile was upon her lips.

But the smile was a forced one.

CHAPTER XXXII.

CAUSE FOR ALARM.

THE black mate of the lugger was in a very uneasy mood, after the departure of the young midshipman.

He had accepted a bribe not to report his presence on board, and yet, if the lugger was not the vessel he was in search of why should the young officer pay to have his visit unknown?

If he did not tell the captain some of the others of the crew would, and so he decided to make a clean breast of it.

It was after dark when the Indian captain returned, and his brow was black, his manner stern.

Black Nick made it his business to at once seek him in the cabin.

"What is it, Nick?" asked the Indian captain sharply.

"We had a visitor, cap'n."

"A visitor?"

"Yes, sah."

"Who was it?"

"An officer from the frigate lying up the stream."

"Hal! what did he want here?"

"He asked all about the lugger, sah, and you too, and then said it was not the craft he was searching for."

"Ah! but what did you tell him?"

"I told him, sah, we went on a trading cruise and had just come back."

"That was right."

"Yes, Cap'n Belt."

"What else?"

"He done give me a ten dollar gold piece, sah."

"He gave you an eagle in gold?" cried Belt, quickly.

"Yes, sah."

"What for?"

"Not to tell you, sah, that he had been here."

The Red-skin Rover sprang to his feet now in alarm.

There was something behind all this, and he knew that there was cause for dread.

He could not understand why an officer from the frigate, whose visit meant nothing, could give gold to his negro mate not to tell of his having been there.

"This looks bad, Mate Nick, and it means trouble for us."

"You is right, I guesses, cap'n."

"You took the money?"

"Yes, sah."

"Well, we will drop down the river to-night and be on the safe side."

"Yes, sah."

"I will go ashore now although I feel wretchedly, and have a terrible headache from some cause; but I must give a list of all I need to a party here to make the purchases for me and send them in another craft to meet us at a rendezvous in the Gulf, for it will not do for us to remain."

"No, sah, I guesses not," was Nick's response, and Belt at once ordered a boat lowered to take him ashore again.

It was his intention to get what purchases he could himself in the next few hours, and leave to another the securing of all else he needed.

So he at once sought a dealer whom he knew and selected what another could not select for him, after which he gave him a list of all else desired, and said:

"Now, Valdez, here is the money, and I wish you to charter a small craft to-morrow, load these things on board and send her skipper at once to the Chaudoleur Islands."

"I will be waiting there, and when the craft comes in sight of the island let her fly two flags so I may know her, one at the fore another at the peak."

"I will transfer the cargo there and your vessel can return."

"I understand, Captain Belt, and there shall be no mistake," answered Valdez.

"You must be particular in all the purchases you make for me, and get the best of everything, for I wish to wholly refit my vessel."

"Send also the boxes which I have ordered sent to you here, for they contain purchases I made to-night."

"Now, I must be off."

With a few more instructions to the agent, Captain Belt took his departure and hastened on board his lugger.

All was quiet then on the river-front, and springing into his waiting boat he rowed rapidly off to his vessel.

"The skies were overcast with clouds and the night was very dark, a mist hanging over the river in spite of a stiff breeze that was blowing down it."

Reaching the lugger Belt gave orders to get the anchor up noiselessly and without setting sail went off with the current.

Not a light did he show on board, and not until the lugger had drifted altogether out of hearing did he dare raise sail.

Then the sails were set, and taking the helm and showing his lights, he swept on down the Mississippi toward the Gulf.

The wind favored him and increasing in force sent the lugger dashing swiftly along, so that an hour after sunrise she ran out of the South Pass and headed along the coast.

There were other vessels heading into the river, some few going out, but none seemed to see anything suspicious in the humble-looking coaster, or the red-skinned man who stood at the helm.

Hugging the coast close he headed along for the Chandeleur Islands where he found a safe anchorage, and where, with sails lowered, he could hide away until the coming of the craft he awaited with such impatience.

It was a wait of several days before Belt Despard was at last rewarded by seeing a vessel heading in along the Chandeleurs as though in search of something.

His glass revealed her to be a clumsy coaster, carrying a small United States flag at her fore and a larger one at the peak.

"That is our vessel, Nick, so now we are all right," he said, his humor at once becoming bright and cheery.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

UNDER THE SHADOWS OF RED CLIFFS.

THE craft sighted by Belt Despard was the one he was waiting for, and he ran up to his fore and mainmasts the signal agreed upon, a red and blue flag.

The vessel stood boldly in, rounded the island and ran alongside of the lugger just at sunset.

There was no sea in that sheltered haven, and the transfer of the cargoes from the coaster to the lugger was made in a few hours.

Then the two vessels got up sail, and while one returned to New Orleans, the other headed for the lagoon retreat.

The next night the lugger ran into the lagoon, and dawn found her anchored within a few rods of the schooner.

With all on board taken ashore, even to her guns, the schooner had been run upon a bar and heeled over, so that her hull could be repaired where it was needed.

The crew had worked well, and with the spars, rigging and paint brought by the lugger, the schooner soon began to present a beautiful appearance.

Floated again upon a high tide, and painted from keel to deck, newly rigged, and with a complete set of new canvas, the schooner presented the appearance of being just launched.

Among his purchases in New Orleans was a new uniform for his black crew, partaking of the Moorish costume, and the American negroes were instructed carefully in what was expected of them in the career which their red-skin captain was to enter upon.

Of treachery among the Africans Belt Despard had no dread, for the only one of them who spoke English was their young chief Kaloo, and he was fully in the secret of the part his captain intended to play.

When at last the schooner was ready to sail the lugger was hauled close ashore, her sails were stowed in the cabin and all was left as before on board, when she had been deserted for an entire year.

Determined to begin at once his career as a Moor, Belt Despard sailed out of the lagoon by night, with his newly equipped vessel and costumed crew, and headed for the pass into Mobile Bay.

He ran boldly in, and just as the east was becoming bright with the approach of day, dropped anchor in the mouth of the creek under the shadows of Red Cliffs.

His sails were lowered and all was made shipshape on board to stand the inspection by day of curious eyes.

His vessel certainly looked like a foreign craft, and when the sun arose, up to her peak went, instead of the Stars and Stripes, the flag of the land of Morocco.

The beacon which shone from her cupola on the new home of Lucille Revello had been a surprise to Belt Despard as he ran up the bay; but he knew that he could not be mistaken, that that was the spot where Lucille Revello had made her home and there he would find her.

As the darkness faded and light came, he regarded with strange interest the changes that had come over the spot.

There looming up above the cliff was the massive castle-like structure which the woman had replaced the home of her girlhood with.

The grounds were in perfect condition, a fine wharf jutted out at the mouth of the stream, a white shell-walk led up the hill to the mansion above and there was a look upon everything about him to show that it was the home of wealth and refinement.

The metamorphosis was simply marvelous, and Belt Despard marveled and marveled.

There was, anchored off the wharf, a pretty little schooner yacht, while several pleasure-boats were also visible further up the stream.

The "Castle" arose massive and imposing, though built of logs, and upon the tower Belt Despard beheld a slender, graceful form, clad in deep black, regarding his vessel through a glass.

"That is the one being in the world to me, now."

"I would know her among a thousand even at this distance."

"It is she who holds my destiny in the hollow of her tiny hand, for it lies in her power to bid me hope, to say that I may win her, and I will cast the past with its haunting shadows behind me and live for the future, live to atone for my evil deeds by a life that shall be a noble one indeed."

"Heaven grant that she say to me the one little word of hope, for glad would my heart be then."

"If she drives me from her, then she but adds fuel to the flames that can never be quenched, never subdued."

"Heaven only knows what I may become then, for I dare not think of it," and the man shuddered at the thought of what he might become.

"Will she know me in this costume, I wonder?"

"Will she penetrate the disguise and see beneath it Belt Despard, the Indian who so madly loves her, or will she see only Rais Selim Ben Alvah, the pretended Moor?"

"I will now put her to the test," and so saying he called to him one of his negro crew, whom he had made his especial companion to act as his valet.

The negro was of blackest hue in complexion, stood six feet four inches tall and had a stern, impassible face.

He was clad in Moorish costume, and when he presented himself in the cabin of the schooner, Captain Belt said, giving the negro the name he had decided to call him as a Moor:

"Alvah, order a boat to take you ashore, present yourself at the mansion on the cliff and say in French that Rais Selim Ben Alvah requests the honor of calling upon the owner of the villa, he having put into this bay under stress of weather."

"Do you understand?"

"Yes, monsieur," responded the negro, speaking with a perfect French accent, and he at once departed upon his errand.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

IN VAIN.

OUT of the stern ports of his luxuriously furnished cabin, for the Indian captain had brought from New Orleans the finest of furniture, and fitted his sea home up most charmingly, he saw Alvah rowed ashore in a boat with six oarsmen and a coxswain.

He saw a man standing on the wharf-step forward and hail the boat, though he could not hear what was said.

After some parley the boat was allowed to land and the giant form of the negro messenger stood a moment talking with the man on the wharf, and then proceeded slowly up the shell-path toward the summit of the cliff.

He soon disappeared from the eyes of the watching Indian, but continued on along the pathway, evidently admiring the scene of beauty about him until he came to a rustic arbor upon the cliff.

Here he halted and gazed about him with evident admiration at the beautiful scene stretched before his eyes.

There lay the schooner far below him, then the bay stretched away for miles, and the distant seaport glimmered in the rays of the morning sun.

Close at hand was the castle of hewn logs, which had arisen like magic in the spot where the home of Reginald Lomax had stood.

There was a landscape of beauty upon either side of it, ornamental grounds, evergreen trees, shrubs, flowers innumerable and shell walks.

Before it was the bay and in the rear a hill sloping to a valley, through which wound a stream of crystal water, while beyond was a range of hills clad with stately pines, spreading live-oaks and superb magnolias.

There in the valley, too, were a number of white cabins, the quarters of the slaves, while far off over the range stretched fields where the negroes were seen at their daily toil.

As he advanced toward the mansion, Alvah was met by a negro clad in white, who asked him who he was and what he wanted in a manner decidedly abrupt.

He replied in French, and unable to understand him, the servant led him to the side portal of the mansion, and called to some one to come to him.

There appeared an octoroon girl, and she at once gazed with considerable curiosity at the strangely clad form of Alvah, while the negro servant said, in English:

"I can't understand his talk, Jeanette, so you try him."

"Does the mademoiselle speak French?" asked Alvah, struck by the beauty of the negress.

"Yes, monsieur, I am French and American, too."

"What would the monsieur?"

"My master, the Captain Selim Ben Alvah, a Moorish noble, has been driven by stress of weather to seek refuge in this bay, and led last night by the beacon of your tower, dropped anchor before dawn beneath the cliff."

"He now begs the honor of paying his respects to the master of this villa, if so it please him to grant the favor."

Jeanette was without doubt impressed with the size and grandeur of the messenger.

He appeared very different from those with whom she came in daily contact upon the plantation.

His costume was gorgeous in the extreme and he looked like a black king, she thought.

Her mistress had seen the boat leave the side of the schooner, and had noted the sable messenger coming up the mill-path.

She had accordingly sent her faithful maid Jeanette down to see why he had come.

She had seen the negro man on duty as porter meet him and bring him on to the mansion and she was anxious to know just who he was and why he had come.

"We have no master here, monsieur, save our little master, for our mistress rules; but I will place before her your request and return presently with an answer."

"Be seated, please, monsieur, and await my coming, while Alex will give you a glass of wine and biscuit."

So saying, Jeanette gave some instruction to the negro porter Alex, who seemed also duly impressed with the majestic black visitor, and he at once hastened to place before him a decanter of wine and some fruit.

In the mean while Jeanette hastened up to the apartments of her mistress.

Lucille Revello was pacing up and down her sumptuously furnished rooms awaiting her.

She had not changed in the time that had gone by, unless for the better, for her face had more color in it than when she had come back to her old home.

Her form was still as willowy and graceful, still clad in deepest black, while her face was just as beautiful.

She wore enormous rubies in her ears, a match to them upon her wedding finger, and bracelets and necklace of the same rare gems, their blood-red hue presenting a startling contrast to her sable robe.

"Well, Jeanette?" she said, turning to her maid as she entered.

"It is the slave, lady, of a Moorish noble, Captain Selim Ben Alvah, who has been driven by stress of weather into the bay, and led by the tower beacon last night headed for it and dropped anchor under the cliff."

"He now seeks an interview, so said his slave, with the master of the mansion."

"The master?"

"So said the slave, lady."

"I am master here, and mistress too."

"So said I to him, lady."

"Why did the wharf guard permit him to land?"

"He spoke only French, lady, and so was sent on up to the mansion as the guard feared his coming might be important."

"Under the circumstances I cannot blame the guard; but Alex did not understand him?"

"No, lady, so called to me."

"A Moorish noble, you say?"

"So said the slave, lady."

"Strange that a Moor should be in these waters, strange indeed; but as it is a Moor then am I mistaken in thinking I recognized the vessel as the slave-ship."

"But, Jeanette?"

"Yes, lady."

"Say to this sable slave of a Moor that there is no master here, but a lady who is in retirement, who sees no one, and so let him report to his master."

"Yes, lady," and Jeanette was evidently deeply disappointed at the response of her mistress.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A SON'S INFLUENCE.

THE octoroon maid returned less briskly than she had gone upon her errand.

She was so much impressed with this grand

sable slave of a Moor that she had been greatly in hopes that her mistress would break through her unbending rule and grant an interview to the master.

Of course this would give her a chance of a chat in French with Algah.

As she neared the outer portals where she had left Algah in the care of Alex, who was striving to be hospitable, talking the while in English, every word of which the stranger understood, she came upon none other than the little master of the house, Reginald Revello.

He had grown much in the time that had elapsed, and was a handsome lad on the verge of his teens.

He was dressed in a handsome sailor suit of black trimmed with silver braid and wore a jaunty tarpaulin encircled by a silver band and in which shone a ruby anchor.

"Ah, Master Reginald, I am so glad I have met you, for I thought you were away on horseback," cried Jeanette.

"No, I have just returned; but who is that black giant at the portal and whom Alex seems so much in awe of?"

Jeanette made known quickly all that she possessed in the way of knowledge about the black giant, and added:

"Now, master, your mother will not see the Moorish noble, and I am so sorry, for I think you would like to go on board the strange vessel and see a Moor and his crew, for all must be so queer and entertaining."

The sly Jeanette knew well how to bait a hook to catch fish, and she was glad to see that she had made no mistake, for Reginald at once said:

"My mother refuses to see the Moorish captain you say, Jeanette?"

"Yes, little master."

"And you are to take the message to the sable giant?"

"I am to say that the Lady of the Cliffs is in retirement and declines to receive the Moorish noble."

"Just wait here until I speak with my mother, Jeanette."

"Yes, master."

"Be sure and do not deliver my mother's message until my return."

"No, master," said the delighted Jeanette, and she hastened on to have a talk with the messenger while Reginald went rapidly along the corridors to his mother's rooms.

She greeted him, as she always did, with a smile and a kiss, and asked:

"Have you seen the strange vessel at anchor under the cliffs, my son?"

"Yes, mother, and I met the Moorish noble's messenger at the door and bade Jeanette await before she delivered your reply until I had seen you."

"And why, Reginald?"

"Well, mother, though I know you live in seclusion here, seeing no one, I wish you to make one exception in this case, for it is not an American who seeks you, but one from far away Morocco, and I would so love to see him, to hear him talk, see his vessel and crew."

"So, mother, I beg of you to ask him to come to Red Cliffs as our guest, and I can go aboard after him."

"No, my son; I desire no man other than my slaves to cross the threshold of my door."

"I cannot admit him, be he whom he may."

"Why, mother, will you not do this much for me, your son, for I do so long to see him and his vessel?"

The mother was silent for a while, and her will and determination to live as a perfect recluse was struggling with her love for the boy.

At last she said:

"Do you really so much wish to see this Moor, my son?"

"Indeed, I do, mother, and it certainly is not hospitable to treat a stranger in our bay in this manner."

"It does seem inhospitable, Reginald, and as you ask it, you shall see him."

"Oh, thank you, mother!" cried the delighted boy.

"I will go at once and ask—"

"No! no! no! You will ask him nothing, for he is not to come here, Reginald."

"But, mother, you just said—"

"I desire that you shall be gratified and see him, and hence you can return with his slave to bear my message back to him, that I never see any one outside of my own household."

"But, mother, I—"

"Go to Alex, my son, and tell him to order fruit, flowers, wines, preserves, and all else that you can take with you, such as fresh meats and vegetables."

"Place them in your barge, with your full crew of oarsmen, and go back with the black messenger to his vessel."

"Tell him that I regret I cannot receive him, and that you beg him to accept what you bear to him as a token of hospitality."

"In this way you will be able to see the Moor, his vessel and crew, and should he invite you to break bread with him, do so."

"And, Reginald?"

"Yes, mother."

"I wish you to examine the vessel closely, and see if the Moor you have ever met before, for

somehow I hold a strange suspicion of that craft."

"Why, mother?"

"More I cannot say, I cannot explain, for I leave it to your keen eyes to tell me all about the Moor, all about his vessel and crew."

"Now, my son, dress yourself well for your visit, and remain to suit your pleasure."

The boy kissed his mother and ran to his rooms, glad to get the chance of going on board the strange vessel and meeting her still stranger commander as he felt that he must be.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE YOUNG ENVOY.

THE long delay before Reginald's return told Jeanette that the boy had triumphed over his mother.

Several times had he done this, for twice had he been given permission to sail over to Mobile in his little yacht, and once so far as New Orleans.

He had purchased, or his mother had done so for him, a handsome little schooner yacht, which he had manned with a dozen black seamen.

In this craft he was wont to cruise about the bay, sometimes venturing out into the Gulf, and, as has been said, twice running over to the port of Mobile.

Whatever his mother's reasons were for hiding herself from the world, he respected them, though he was old enough now to wonder why she did so.

He dwelt in the mansion in contentment, enjoyed his cruising, his horses, dogs and hunting in the forests, and his life at home with his mother.

A certain time he devoted to study, his mother being the teacher, and he was glad to learn of the great world outside of his home.

That this strange home, his mother's life of seclusion, the strange slaves they possessed, and his life, were the subject of much comment over the bay in the town, and to the coasting craft, he well knew.

But the will of his mother was his own, and he was happy in respecting it, for he fairly worshiped her, while he well knew that he was the idol of her life.

But he was glad to have her yield so far from her determination as to allow him to board the vessel at anchor under the shadow of the cliffs.

He dressed himself in his best, ordered the crew of his barge to be in readiness, and went down to meet the black messenger of the Moor.

Algah was having a charming time with the coquettish Jeanette, and cared little how time was flying, especially as the maid had bidden him await his answer until the return of her young master.

When at last Reginald appeared, Algah arose and made a deep salaam, which quite intoxicated Jeanette with delight at his foreign grandeur, for she was already impressed with his great importance, and had questioned him very closely about his life in Morocco.

Jeanette would have given much to have been appointed to accompany her young master on board the vessel, but she received no indication that she would be allowed to do so, and consequently bade Algah a sad farewell, when Reginald said in French:

"My man, I have ordered some fruits and other things sent to my barge to carry off to your master, and I will now return with you to your vessel to present my mother's regrets at being unable to welcome him at our house."

"Come, I am ready."

With another salaam Algah followed, though with many a hasty backward glance at Jeanette as he did so.

Down the shell path they went, the black walking a respectful distance behind the boy, and upon arriving at the wharf, they found there the barge and its crew.

The oarsmen had each brought with them a large basket, and all were deposited in the barge.

One was of fresh meats and fowls, another of fruits, a third of flowers, a fourth and fifth of vegetables, and a sixth of the purest wines.

Certainly a most acceptable offer of hospitality they were to poor sailors who had been long at sea.

The boat which had brought Algah ashore was there in waiting, but Reginald told the black messenger to return with him, and he obeyed.

From the windows of his cabin Captain Despard had watched the mansion, and wondered at the long delay of the man he had sent upon his mission.

He had begun to grow very uneasy when he at last saw Algah following the boy down the shell walk to the wharf.

Then he had seen the barge put off with the boy, and the black in it, and instantly he began to prepare to receive company.

"He will not recall me, I am sure, though the boy had keen eyes."

"But this costume and the part I am playing will disguise me completely," he said.

Soon after the barge was hailed from the deck

in an unknown tongue, and Algah replied in the same language, when the boat was ordered alongside the vessel.

"I will tell my master of your coming, monsieur," said Algah, and he hastened toward the cabin.

"Well, you have returned?"

"Yes, Captain Belt—"

"I am master now, or Rais."

"Pardon me, master, I had forgotten."

"It is all right, only keep your wits about you, Algah; but the boy returned with you?"

"He did, master."

"And you saw the lady?"

"No, master, she would not see me, and the little master, her son, has returned to explain all."

"He bade me await his coming, or I should have sooner returned."

"He is with you?"

"He awaits your pleasure on deck, master."

"Conduct him hither at once," said the Indian captain.

At once Algah left the cabin, and approaching Reginald with deep respect, he said:

"The mighty Rais will receive the little master."

Reginald had been glancing over the vessel, gazing at the crew of savage-looking blacks, in their gorgeous Moorish attire, and so had not been impatient at the delay.

He simply nodded when Algah returned, and followed him as the black requested him to do.

Entering the cabin, in spite of the luxurious surroundings amid which he lived at home, the boy was quite taken aback at the luxurious magnificence of the sea home of the Moor.

He saw about him only that which a man of great wealth and cultivated taste could command.

The cabin looked like an Oriental curiosity-shop, for there were soft rugs from Smyrna, rich silk drapings, divans, and any number of weapons and curios hanging about in profusion.

And the man?

He arose as the boy entered.

Tall, splendidly formed, his long black hair resting upon his shoulders, while his handsome face was shaded by the Moorish turban, in which sparkled a rare gem.

His dress was that of a Moorish captain in the sea service, a cimeter hung at his belt, and his whole bearing was one of dignity.

In perfect French he said, as Algah ushered the boy into his presence:

"The Rais Selim Ben Alvah has the honor and pleasure of welcoming to his sea home his young guest."

"Be seated, monsieur, and let us be friends."

Reginald was delighted with his reception, and gazed upon his host with a look of complete fascination.

He answered his welcoming speech in French, and then went on to make his excuses for not receiving the visitor at Red Cliffs, as his mother was dwelling in perfect retirement.

He presented the things he had brought with him, and feeling that he had acquitted himself well as his mother's envoy, sat down to enjoy his visit and all there was in it for him.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE MOOR'S RESOLVE.

HAVING heard the excuses made by Reginald, of why his mother did not receive the stranger in her home, the Moor, for he was playing the part of Selim Ben Alvah, and I will now refer to him as such, decided to do all in his power to charm his young guest.

He showed no ill-feeling at the decision of Lucille Revello, whatever he might feel, and set about making the boy regard him with confidence and respect.

He showed him the different weapons he had in his cabin, with a number of other things which Reginald greatly enjoyed looking at, told him that he should keep him to break bread with him in the afternoon meal, and then escorted him all over his vessel.

Had the boy been a prince he could not have shown him greater and more respectful attention.

He called his crew on deck and had them drill for him, giving his orders in a tongue which was wholly unknown in sound and expression to the boy.

At last the meal was announced by Algah and the young guest was invited to break bread with the supposed Moor.

All that went on Reginald took close scrutiny of, and he greatly regretted that he could not invite the handsome stranger to Red Cliffs that his mother might meet him.

And so he told the commander of the vessel, answered pleasantly:

"Some time I may meet your mother, monsieur, and you will know me better."

"I hope so, Monsieur Le Capitain, for I wish to: but my mother has retired from the world and will see no one, so I fear you are never to meet her."

"But I will tell her how you have treated me, and I hope some day as you said, we will meet again."

"I trust so," was the answer, and soon after the youth had to take his departure, for in glancing from the stern-ports he had seen a flag flying from the flag-staff which his mother only set as a signal when he was cruising on the bay and she wished him to come home.

He felt that, as he had been gone for several hours, she was becoming anxious regarding his long stay and so had set the signal for his return.

So he bade farewell to his new-found friend and, after slipping a golden eagle into the palm of Algah, went on deck escorted by the Rais.

The crew of the barge had been well treated by the men of the vessel and had not fretted at the long stay of their master.

"Farewell, my young friend, and remember that whenever we meet again and under whatever circumstances, we are to be the best of friends," said the captain, warmly shaking the hand of his youthful guest, who replied:

"Yes, Monsieur Le Captain, I will remember that it is to be so."

Then Reginald went over the side into the barge and his men pulled rapidly ashore.

Captain Despard watched his departure for awhile then turned and entered his cabin.

But he kept his eyes upon the villa from the cabin, and with his glass saw the boy go up the shell path and saw him clasped in his mother's arms as he entered the mansion for she had met him at the door.

"So she refuses to see me, does she?"

"Well, it is not *me* that she refuses any more than any one else.

"But does she not suspect, not know me?"

"Has she not recognized this vessel?"

"It may be.

"If so, then it is *me* that she refuses to see.

"That however will not do with me, for I came here to see her and see her I will, cost what it may.

"I shall know if she cares for me in the least, or wishes to get rid of me.

"I tried hard to win her love, and I had hoped that I was successful until we parted, and then I knew that I must possess wealth, be all-powerful to win her.

"Now I have fought for power and riches, and here I am before her home, and I will not depart until I have seen her and known just what her feeling for me is.

"How well I gleaned from that boy a history of his home life, and found out just how I could get the opportunity to see her, for he said that she walks each evening upon the cliff all alone, seemingly, as the boy expressed it, engaged in prayer and self-communion.

"Well, I shall see her this night, for when the shadows of night fall I will be there at the cliff to meet her.

"I know the way, and we will land on the beach and not at the wharf where a watchman is constantly kept, the boy said.

"I must see her, for I cannot back out now, not when I have triumph within my very grasp.

"How I have signed to accomplish this very end, to come face to face with her, to tell her that I was no longer the poor Indian captain of a coasting craft, but had won rank and riches, had a home grander than her own in the sunny land of Cuba to make her the mistress of, and would bear her there a joyous bride.

"Yes, I have sinned most grievously to tell her this, and if she will not hear me, will not give me her love in return, then will it be for my love to turn to hatred, to seek to avenge myself upon her that she has maddened my soul, turned my brain and bid me go far from her.

"Oh! the power that a woman can possess over a man for good or evil.

"It is terrible, and beautiful women should hesitate ere they win a love, a heart only to cast it away from them, to break it as a child would a toy.

"Now it is becoming dark, the shadows begin to lengthen, and I will prepare to meet Lucille Revello face to face this night."

And with this resolve the man ordered the gig lowered after dark, the oars to be muffled, and Algah alone to be ready to accompany him.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE MEETING ON THE CLIFF.

ALGAH was in the gig all ready when darkness shut the shore out from view distinctly.

The beacon flamed out from the tower in the mansion, and cast a stream of light far away down the bay, while it could also be seen from Mobile, and half-way down to the pass.

The dark shores were silent, save for the hooting of an owl in the forests, or the barking of a dog over at the negro quarters in the valley.

The Indian captain, still clad in his garb of a Moor, came out of his cabin, and went over the side into his boat.

Kaloo, the African sub-chief, was now next in command to the Indian captain, for he had become a thorough sailor and could handle the crew splendidly.

In his charge Belt Despard left the vessel, merely remarking that he would return before very long.

Going over the side into his boat he took the

tiller, Algah let fall the muffled oars, and they moved noiselessly away, not toward the pier but the beach, under the shadows of the mansion.

There was a mimic surf falling upon the sandy shore, and Belt headed straight in upon it.

The boat grounded within a few feet of the shore, and the Indian captain leaped out upon the sands.

"Await me here, Algah," was all he said as he walked away.

He made his way along the road at the base of the cliff until he came to a place where he could climb to the shell walk leading up to the mansion.

He was soon in the walk, and as he walked slowly along, the moon began to peer over the tops of the magnolia trees and light up the scene.

The night was a perfect one and invited a stroll, and the lone woman within doors was tempted to go out upon the cliff.

It was her wont to take a walk each night, and now she wandered out toward an arbor some distance from the mansion.

The thought of danger, of meeting even any of her own people, never entered her mind.

She reached the arbor and then stood gazing down upon the bay, with the strange vessel at anchor there.

Had she hailed, her voice would readily have reached her decks.

But there she stood in silence while her gaze was riveted upon the craft rocking so gently upon the moonlit waves that rolled shoreward.

"I have seen too much of sea life, have been a sailor too long to be mistaken, and I am sure that is the hull of the slave-ship I left in the lagoon.

"Why, I had almost forgotten its very existence until the coming of this vessel recalled it to me.

"It has the same gaunt look amidships, the same narrow stern and high, sharp bows, with the figurehead of a mermaid rising from the sea.

"I cannot be mistaken, and yet who got her from the lagoon, who is this man that commands her and who has completely fascinated my boy.

"Reginald told me that he seems to have met him before, and that he is a noble-looking man, as courtly as a French cavalier whom I have read of to him.

"Can it be that this Indian Belt, this skipper of a coaster, can have been metamorphosed into a Moorish Rais?"

"He had a taint of negro blood in his veins, and yet no one would have known it.

He had seen much of the world, was courtly ever in his manner, gentle as a woman yet all a man, and had a heart and brain far above his station.

"Can it be that this pretended Moor is Belt, the Indian sailor?"

She had leaned against the arbor there in the moonlight, and was musing aloud.

She deemed herself solely alone, and through some strange reasoning she had made out to her satisfaction that the vessel she gazed upon was the slave-ship which she had found adrift at sea with a cargo of human freight when she was on the lugger coming to her home.

As she asked herself the question, little did she expect an answer.

But ere she had reached the arbor the Indian captain had glided up the shell walk toward the mansion.

The arbor had caught his eye and he had entered it.

No one was there.

Then he stealthily made his way nearer to the mansion.

There were lights within, and he beheld the form of the woman whom he had come there to see.

She was throwing about her head and shoulders a long black Spanish veil, arranging it in graceful folds, as only a Spaniard or Cuban woman can do.

"She is coming out for her walk," he muttered, and he stole back quickly toward the arbor.

The moon had risen now, and he crept into the shadows to conceal himself from view.

From his place of hiding he beheld the woman leave the mansion and come slowly toward the arbor.

She was dressed in black, the long Spanish veil protecting her head and shoulders, and she looked very graceful, very beautiful as she stood there in the moonlight; every word that she uttered he heard, and he could not but give her credit for wonderful powers of perception.

Then came the question she had put to herself:

"Can it be that this pretended Moor is Belt, the Indian sailor?"

In a low tender voice came the response:

"You have divined the truth, lady."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE REFUSAL.

MOST women would have uttered a startled cry as the words of a man fell upon their ears, when they supposed themselves alone.

But with Lucille Revello it was different.

She merely wheeled quickly to face the speaker, and as she did so her hand was thrust to her side and when raised held a jeweled stiletto.

"Ah, lady, do not fear me, for I am as you surmised, only Belt the Indian sailor," said the man, stepping forward where the moonlight fell full upon him.

"Yes, you are Belt the lugger's sailing-master," she said slowly, as she gazed upon him, and added:

"No, I do not fear you, for I fear no man."

He stood where the moonlight fell full upon him.

If by design, he could not have chosen a better spot, for his every feature and peculiarity of dress was revealed.

She saw certainly a superb specimen of manhood before her.

His Moorish costume was gorgeous in the extreme, and more, it was dazzling with jewels.

But his manner was humble, not haughty before her.

"Why are you here, Belt?" she said coldly, calling him by name, as before when he served her.

"I am here to see you, lady."

"All business between us was at an end when I paid you for your services."

He seemed cut at this, for he started and his face changed color.

But he responded:

"No, lady, there is some unsettled business between us."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, lady."

"What can it be?"

"There is a debt to be settled between us, lady."

"If I owe you, sir, you have only to name the sum."

"You misunderstand me, lady, for the debt is due you from me."

"If I overpaid you so let it be."

"But I owe you, lady, for the vessel I now command, and I am here to pay you her price."

"You refer to the slave-ship?"

"Yes, lady."

"I left her as a mere wreck in the lagoon?"

"Yes, lady."

"You fitted her up and now are her commander?"

"Such is the case, lady."

"Well, you took her without permission, and yet I suppose she belongs to you as much as to me.

"I chartered your lugger, and you were her captain when we picked up the slave-ship.

"I have the slaves, you take the vessel, so that squares any debt there may be between us."

"But I prefer to pay for the vessel."

"That you cannot do, so take the craft."

"I am amply able to pay your price, lady, for I am no longer a poor man."

"I am glad to hear of your good fortune; but were you worth ever so much I will not receive pay for the vessel.

"She is yours, keep her."

"I thank you, lady, but I hardly know what to say."

"I have said for you, sir, keep the vessel and go your way in peace with her.

"Is there any other debt outstanding between us, Belt?"

"Have you no desire to learn of all my good fortune, lady?"

"What interest does it hold for me?"

"I had hoped that it held much for you, lady?"

"Why so?"

"Lady, did you not see when I was with you, that I loved you, that you were all in all to me?" cried the man, with sudden vehemence.

"Why should I see what I did not care to?"

"You stood in the place of servant to me, and I treated you as I do all beneath me, with kindness, and you presumed upon it to tell me of your loving me, and this you have no right to do."

"I did not presume when I was what you knew me to be, an humble skipper of a coasting vessel.

"But I have changed, for you made me what I am, my love for you changed my whole nature, lady."

"I determined to become a man, to forget my humble origin, to climb higher and higher and then come to you and tell you of my love, asking you to become my wife."

"Sir!"

"I did rise in the world, I did make a fortune and in the sunny land of Cuba I have bought a home fit for a queen, fit even for you, Lucille."

"I have there servants who shall be your slaves, and a home where you can know only happiness, for every moment of my life, every act, shall be devoted to that end."

"I would take you there, you and your splendid boy, and devote my life to you, for I have ample riches to give you all that heart can desire."

"Now, Lucille, forget that you knew me as Belt the Indian captain, and remember me to-day as Selim Ben Alvah the Moor, a gentleman

of wealth, and one whose whole heart is your own."

He paused and looked at her in a wistful, pleading way that was almost pitiful.

She had gazed steadily at him, her mobile face showing no sign of emotion the while, and now when he had finished speaking she replied in a voice strangely cold:

"Have you more to say, Belt?"

"Nothing more, lady."

"I await your answer," was the low reply.

"What you are God made you, but were you a thousand times different I could never love you."

"I loved once, and wedded one whom I did not love."

"My idol was shattered and my life is a blank now."

"Go your way and forget that ever Lucille Revello crossed your path."

"Go, Belt the Indian captain, your way lies down that way toward the Gulf, and never let the prow of your vessel be again pointed toward my home."

"Go, Belt, for I will remain here and watch your vessel glide away in the moonlight, fade from my view forever, for so it must be."

CHAPTER XL.

HIS THREAT.

ALTHOUGH Lucille Revello beheld the face of Belt Despard distinctly in the moonlight, and saw its workings, she did not hesitate in what she had to say.

Her words fell upon his ears with a sound far more to him than would a knell of death.

He heard them as a death-blow to his every hope in life, to his heart, his love, and his impassioned nature was aroused to its utmost tenacity.

His hands were clutched tightly, his bosom heaved convulsively and his whole face worked with emotion.

His eyes seemed to sink far back into his head and fairly burn with the glow that was in them.

"Have you more to say, Lucille Revello?" he asked in a voice that was deep and quivering.

"Nothing."

"You mean all that you have said?"

"I am not one to speak idly, Belt, so I mean all that I have said."

"You refuse my love?"

"I do."

She had not, in what she had said, spoken unkindly, but rather with sympathy for him and his hopeless love.

But Belt Despard was too blind to see this, he only knew that she discarded his deep affection, refused to listen to his pleadings for a return of his love.

His changed career, his beautiful home in Cuba, his riches had not, as he had firmly believed they would, tempted her to become his wife.

Now he saw that her refusal was final and he realized it in all its bitterness.

At once his tone changed, in the twinkling of an eye, to almost an abhorrence for the haughty, beautiful woman who had spurned him from her.

He hated her with an intensity as deep as he had loved, and what made it the more determined and bitter was the instantaneous reaction of feeling, which had come over him just while she was speaking to him, refusing his idolatrous worship, his rank as a Moorish captain, his home in Cuba and his fortune.

She had given him the vessel even as she might reward a faithful servant who had served her well.

Now, when he heard her last refusal, he said:

"Lucille Revello, hear me, for I have listened in patience to you, though your every cold word cut deep into my heart like a two-edged knife."

"Why say more, for my refusal is final?"

"I would say more, because I wish to show you just what you made of me in the past, what you will make of me in the future."

"I was but a poor coasting skipper when I saw you, and loving you as I learned to do from the moment we met, I was ennobled."

"I struggled for riches solely for your sake, to secure a fortune alone for you, a home, and all to make you forget a past which I knew had been a bitter one to you, though you had never told me so."

"How I got that fortune does not matter now, though I may say that like the gaining of gold that most men get, it came by crime."

"But all was of no avail it seems."

"I went to the lagoon, fitted out the wreck, turned Moor and hoped to win you."

"But no, I could not, I failed."

"As you made me strive to be worthy of you, so now when I lose you, when you cast me off, will I strive to make you dread me."

"You have given me that vessel lying there, whether yours to give or not is all the same. I accept the gift, and I shall put it to a use that will cause you to regret the day when you cast from you Belt Despard, spurned his love and told him to never cross your path again."

"The seas are before me, and a splendid vessel beneath my tread, while I have a crew that will wade through Hades to follow me."

"They are a crew of blacks, as your son doubtless told you, and a flag of sable hue will be good enough to sail under for them and for me."

"My God! your awful threat is to turn pirate?" cried Lucille Revello, moved out of her calmness for once by his words.

"You have read me aright, Lucille Revello. I shall turn pirate."

"No, not that, not that!"

"Yes, just that, and why not?"

"Because, to become what you have you have proven yourself possessed of noble manhood, so do not drag your good resolves in the dust, do not turn your hand against your fellow-man, simply because a woman refuses your love, I beg of you," she pleaded.

"You do refuse it?" he eagerly asked.

"Most assuredly," was her cold reply.

"Then upon your head be what I am to become."

"Upon your ears must fall the wails of women, the groans of dying men, the weeping of children, for I shall go forth to destroy."

"Yonder beautiful vessel, your gift, I have named the Destroyer, and I vow to you that she shall be worthy of her name, shall deserve it fully."

"I vow to you that the wake of my vessel shall be tinged with crimson, that the shadow that falls upon her decks shall be cast by the black flag of the buccaneer, and upon your head rest my deeds in the future, woman, for you it is that drives me to become a very Satan upon the sea."

He wheeled from her as he spoke, and strode rapidly away.

She watched him until she saw him disappear down the cliff path, and soon after beheld his boat standing off for the schooner.

A few moments more and the sails were set, and away glided the vessel like a huge ghost of the sea over the moonlit waters.

CHAPTER XLII.

IN DREAD.

UNTIL the white sails of the flying craft faded from her view far down the bay, did Lucille Revello stand there on the cliff gazing after her.

Never before had she been so deeply moved by a threat, for somehow there came into her heart a great, an appalling dread.

She did not fear for herself, for he had offered her no harm, had made no threat of evil to her other than that he held her responsible for the crimes of the future committed by him.

But she realized how well he must know that her life was wrapped up in her boy, her noble little Reginald, and it flashed upon her that through him would he strike at her.

"Through my boy will he be avenged upon me," she groaned in her anguish, and at once, as the sail, which had held her fascinated, as it were, no longer was in sight, she turned and went toward her house.

Old Linda met her, anxious at her long stay, and said that the young master had retired to his bed, and left good-night for her.

"Linda, you must be more watchful of Reginald, far more so than in the past," she said excitedly, and the negress felt that something had occurred to move her mistress thus.

"You doesn't think, Missy Lucille, that the ship that is here is not all right?" she asked.

"The schooner is not here, she has gone; but yet I fear that vessel, the one who commands her, so be watchful of her for my sake, for Reginald's."

"I will, missy."

"Linda, I can trust you, for you knew me as I was, know me as I am, and I'll tell you a secret."

"Yes, missy."

"I came here, as you know, to live in seclusion only to protect my boy, to have him ever near me, and not let him mingle with the world, to know what his father was, for some one would some day have told him all."

"So they would, missy."

"But here has come one whom I now have reason, every reason in the world, Linda, to fear, to stand in awe of."

"Lordy! you don't mean, missy, that the chief is—"

"No! no! no! not as bad as that, and yet it may be after all."

"No, he is dead, for I saw him dead on the deck of his vessel, the pirate craft rather, which he had captured."

"Yes, he is dead, and I have nothing to fear from him; but what I do fear, Linda, is the man whose lugger brought us here."

"Lor', that nigger Injun Belt, missy?"

"Yes, the lugger's captain."

"What has he got ag'in' you?"

"He has made threats against me, or rather that I fear will fall upon my boy."

"The mean red nigger! just let me catch him!"

"But when did you see him, missy?"

"He was here to-night, Linda."

"To-night, missy?"

"Yes, for he it is who commands that vessel, the schooner."

Linda was amazed, and so expressed herself at this bit of information, while Lucille went on to say:

"He commands that vessel, and it is the wrecked slave-ship we left in the lagoon, wholly fitted out and in splendid condition."

"But I thought it was a Moor captain on her, missy."

"It was Belt, playing the part of a Moor, to suit his own ends, Linda, and he has turned pirate, and—"

"Turned pirate?"

"Oh, Lordy! but what a bad man he is, and I allus thought he was so good, too good for a Injun, missy."

"And I always thought so much of him, Linda; but he has turned pirate, and he made some awful threats, and so it is that I fear he means harm to my boy."

"You will watch him more carefully than ever, Linda, will you not?"

"I will, missy, and no harm shall come to it."

"Alas! I dread it!" was the reply, and the woman passed on to her rooms, where Jeanette was awaiting to be of service to her in disrobing for the night.

It was long, however, before Lucille could sink to sleep, for her brain was in a whirl, her heart aching over all that had occurred.

She knew that Belt Despard could be made either the best or worst of men.

His Indian blood was merciless if aroused to hatred, or cruelty, and considering himself wronged because she did not return his love, he was just the one to carry out his appalling threats.

He had intelligence, nautical knowledge, experience and undoubted courage and nerve, requisite to make a very dangerous man if not directed in the right direction, Lucille understood full well.

Then came the thought to her that she would fortify her place, drill her slaves like soldiers and live as it were in a fortified camp, or fort.

But this she very quickly decided would bring suspicion upon her from the Government officers, and she dismissed it from her mind.

Then came the thought that she would go over to Mobile, and inform the commander of any cruisers that might be there that she had reason to know that a very fleet vessel, sailing under a Moorish flag, colors never seen there in Mexican waters, was nothing more than a pirate, and that by cruising over toward the island of Cuba the vessel could be found.

"He will carry out his threat and turn pirate, I am sure, and self-preservation is the first law of nature, so I should protect myself, should save my boy, for upon him will his malice fall to be avenged upon me."

So she argued, and having decided upon her course upon the morrow she at last sunk into an uneasy sleep.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A RESCUE.

TOWARD midnight, after the sailing of the schooner, the moon became overcast with clouds and the winds began to blow harder and harder.

It was early when Reginald awoke, and he sprang from his couch quickly, for he had arranged for a run down the bay to the Gulf for a trip after red fish.

He did not care to disturb his mother, and so hastened down to his little yacht, where he found her crew ready awaiting him.

It was blowing half a gale, and the skies were very threatening, the indications being that a storm was to follow.

But Reginald was a born sailor, and an experienced one too, young as he was, and the white-caps and howling winds just suited him, for his yacht was a staunch one, standing up well under her canvas and taking the seas splendidly.

So the yacht moved out of the creek slowly until the wind struck her fairly and then went flying away like a frightened bird.

Down the bay she flew, leaving the Red Cliffs far astern, and plunging into the seas in magnificent style.

"It will be awful ugly outside, little master," said the negro mate as the yacht went staggering along, and he pointed to the darkening skies and still rising wind.

"Yes, Mack, it will be too much for us I guess to attempt to run out to the fishing-banks to-day; but we can run down and see how the Gulf looks, and if the storm catches us we can anchor in the cove," answered Reginald.

"Yes, little master, and it's a-goin' ter catch us sart'in," was Mack's assertion, and he was a weather-wise sailor as Reginald knew.

In fact, Mack had been a deep-water seaman, could navigate a vessel and was such a thorough sailor, that Lucille Revello had made him the boatman of the place and mate of Reginald's yacht.

They were now down in what was known as the Lower Bay, where there was a sweep of waters for thirty miles, and a good depth to raise rough seas.

The wind also came sweeping across the Gulf harder and harder, and with only the low point

of land that forms the right arm of Mobile Bay to offer the least check to its velocity.

The yacht had been reefed in mainsail, foresail and jib, and the topmast housed, so that she was standing the fierce winds bravely, although they had now increased to a gale.

"I'll go aloft, Mack, and see how the Gulf looks outside," said the boy, and glass in hand he climbed to the fore cross-trees.

The course of the yacht was straight for the entrance to the bay, Reginald having stood boldly across instead of beating inshore to seek the lee of the land.

He turned his glass at the Gulf and gave a loud whistle.

"Whew! we'll run for the cove, Mack, for it's blowing great guns outside, I can tell you," he called out.

"All right, little master."

"I believe we are going to get it worse too, Mack, as you said."

"Yes, little master, I am sure of it; but you better come down, sir, for she is staggering as you see."

The boy made no reply, for he had suddenly turned his gaze upon some object upon the waters ahead.

"Mack!"

"Yes, sir."

"Let her fall off steadily—more yet—steady as you are."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"There is something ahead now that looks like a man clinging to an upturned boat."

This explained the reason for the boy's changing the yacht's course, and all was now excitement among the sable crew.

"It is an upturned boat, Mack, and there is a man clinging to it—there! he waves his cap to us."

From the deck nothing could be seen but the tumbling, foaming waves, and so Reginald had to direct the steering of the yacht from aloft.

Had it been the weight of a man then it would have caused the yacht to keel over still more than she did; but Reginald's light weight was not enough to materially drag her over.

Another reef had been taken in the mainsail and the foresail had been lowered, but with this canvas the yacht had all she could do in the increasing fury of the gale, to stagger through the waves.

"Luff a little, Mack."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Steady now, for we are pointing directly for him."

"Steady it is, sir."

The yacht was now but a short distance from the man, and he could be seen from the deck as he rose on a wave from time to time.

The boy made his calculations well, for he saw that they could run to leeward of him, luff sharp and throw him a line while the yacht was in stays to drag him on board.

This he called down to Mack, and from aloft directed the steering of the yacht.

As they drew near it was seen that the man was clinging to some wreckage, and it seemed hard work for him to hold his position.

Then the shrill, clear voice of the boy was heard hailing:

"Aho! aho! we will run to leeward of you and go about."

"Stand by to catch a rope!"

"Ay, ay, sir," came in sharp, seamanlike tones, and the boy then told Mack to have his two best men ready to cast lines.

A moment more and the yacht dashed to leeward of the wreckage, swept up into the wind and the ropes were thrown, but each missed, the power of the wind dashing them back.

"We'll try it again," cried Reginald and away darted the yacht to once more make the effort.

Again it failed; but the third attempt met with success, the man caught one of the ropes and was drawn to the side of the yacht.

"I have a broken arm, lads, so you have to give me all the aid you can," he said, and eager hands seized him and drew him to the deck of the yacht, now staggering under the fury of the gale which was increasing to a tempest.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE BATTLE FOR LIFE.

THE moment that the rescued man was drawn on board the yacht, he was placed in a safe place, and all hands turned to the care of the little schooner, for now the tempest was upon them with full force.

The stranger was utterly helpless, for his left arm hung limp by his side, and exposure and the exertion of clinging to the wreckage had prostrated him wholly, strong and athletic though he was.

He had on a fatigue uniform, was minus his cap and wore the rank of a captain in the naval service of the United States.

Though pale and haggard, evidently suffering greatly, he was calm and fearless-looking, and said in a plucky way:

"If there is anything I can do to help you, command me."

"We can weather it all right, sir, thank you,"

said Reginald, and he stepped to the tiller by the side of Mack, upon whom now devolved the full management of the yacht.

That he understood his work, and the gravity of the situation he at once showed, for he was as watchful as a hawk, had every man at his post of duty, and had stripped the yacht to fore-stay-sail and mainsail reefed down.

The yacht proved her seaworthy qualities in masterly style, for the tempest was now howling over the waters, and the waves in the bay were rivaling those of the Gulf a few leagues away.

The storm came from off the Gulf, and with the yacht pointed homeward, which was a course nearly due north, she caught the wind upon her starboard beam, and went plunging, lunging, staggering along at a tremendous speed, her decks swept by volumes of water, the spray flying far above her masts, and yet held unswervingly on her way by the strong arm of the negro mate.

Never before had the black crew of the yacht been out in such a storm, and Reginald did not remember having seen such a blow during the years of his young life.

That the officer crouching in the cockpit had seen a bad if not worse in his experience as a sailor there was no doubt; but he appeared to have perfect trust in the vessel and her crew, and he felt no anxiety as to the result, helpless as he was.

He realized that he could not have held on to the wreckage much longer, had the youth not come to his rescue, and with the increase of the storm his life would have quickly ended, crippled as he was by a broken arm.

When crouching there in the cockpit, his attention was diverted between the vessel, the wild seas, the black helmsman and the boy.

He had given a start, when his gaze first fell upon Reginald, and for some time his look was riveted upon him.

Then he had uttered a sigh, set his lips and turned his attention to the storm and the struggling schooner.

He saw that the vessel was doing splendidly, and no if mistake was made she would weather the storm in safety.

But he knew that any slight mistake might cost them all their lives.

Mack was cool and skillful, and the boy seemed really delighted at the danger they were in, for his face shone radiantly and his merry laugh broke forth whenever a larger wave than usual would make the crew duck their heads and cling as for their lives.

As the yacht drove on the waters became more shallow, but the sweep of the gale drove out from across Bon Lecours Bay and the wind was terrific.

Only the skill of the negro mate saved the yacht from going over time and again.

At length the craft was off Point Clear, and that magnolia-clad point of land broke the force of the gale in a measure.

The waters also shallowed considerably and the waves were less high and severe, while the land rose higher and higher, forming a better lee for protection.

The Red Cliffs were now in sight, with the towers of the mansion, and the yacht's bows were pointed closer and closer to try and make the mouth of the creek.

But this could not be done, and the yacht went to a position above the mansion, then put about and began to beat in for a harborage.

It was nearly sunset when the little vessel at last ran into the creek and glided alongside of the pier.

"Now, sir, we are home and can take good care of you," said the lad as he sprung out upon the pier and extended his hand to the officer.

The latter tried to follow him, but sunk back too exhausted to do so.

"Mack, have the men get a hammock and stretch it upon two oars to make a stretcher to carry the gentleman."

"I will go on up to the mansion and have all ready to receive him," said Reginald, and with a word to the officer he hastened on up the shell walk toward the house.

As he reached the top of the hill he beheld his mother coming to receive him.

Her face was white with dread, for she had watched with her glass the yacht's flight with the storm for hours.

From the tower, where she had crouched down upon her knees, to withstand the force of the wind, she had been praying for the safety of her boy, and now her heart was glad to see him returned to her after his battle with the element where defeat meant certain death.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE WATCHERS ON THE TOWER.

WHEN Mrs. Revello had awakened in the morning she found that it was very late.

Not having gone to sleep until nearly dawn she had appeared so sweetly slumbering when Jeanette went into the room that after calling once she had not the heart to arouse her.

Then too, she saw that the day was blustering and unpleasant, and as Master Reginald had

gone on a cruise down the bay, she decided to let her mistress sleep as long as she could do so.

"Why, Jeanette, what time is it?" asked Lucille, as she arose from her couch.

"It is eleven o'clock, madam," was the answer.

"Why, Jeanette, how I have slept!"

"Why did you not arouse me?"

"I called madam, but as she did not answer, and the day was bad, and Master Reginald was away, I thought it best to let madam sleep."

"Reginald away?"

"Madam my mistress will remember that he was to go to-day to the Fishing Banks."

"Ah, yes, I had forgotten it; but I did not see him to say good-night last night, and this morning have not seen him."

"But the sleep has refreshed me, Jeanette, and I am glad that you allowed me to sleep."

As she sat down near the window to have her hair dressed, Jeanette pulled the curtains aside, revealing the ugly look of the skies and waters.

The room was on the west side of the mansion, so that the force of the gale coming from the east had not been noticed before.

Now the face of the woman paled and she said:

"What! has my boy gone off on such a day as this?"

"It has grown ugly, madam, since little master departed."

"Why, it is blowing a gale, and a severe storm is threatening, I am sure."

"Quick, arrange my hair, Jeanette, that I may go upon the tower and look at the weather."

The maid soon had her hair dressed, and after partaking of a light breakfast, Lucille went on deck, accompanied by Linda and Jeanette also.

It was now afternoon, and the gale was at its height, and changing into a tempest.

The winds caused the strongly-built mansion to quiver, and afar off from under the lee of the cliffs, the bay was a sheet of foam.

Not a vessel was in sight, and over in the distant seaport of Mobile the glass revealed every craft stripped to meet the storm.

"Oh, Heaven have mercy upon my poor boy," cried the almost despairing mother, as she gazed about her.

"Little master is all right, never fear, madam, my mistress," said the octoroon maid, while Linda added:

"Yes, Missy Lucille, he hain't goin' ter git drowned, for he too good sailor, and you knows Mack is along, too."

"Thank Heaven for that, for Mack is a splendid fellow, and knows just what to do."

"They caught the storm, madam, before they reached the Gulf, and would run for the cove, so have no fear," chirped the pretty Creole negress, who was French, and had a familiar manner about her with her mistress which Lucille knew was not meant to be pert.

"Yes, they could run for the cove, and doubtless have done so; but see, there is not a vessel in sight."

"Jeanette!"

"Yes, Madam Lucille."

"Get me the large ship's spy-glass in the library."

Jeanette departed and soon returned, and in her hands was a spy-glass.

Leveling this and resting it upon a bracket, Lucille swept the lower bay with her glance.

"Do you see the yacht, missy?" asked Linda, anxiously.

"Nothing is in sight— Ah! there is a sail in sight—a schooner."

"Little master went in his schooner yacht, madam," said Jeanette.

"Then that is the yacht, and she is in the center of the lower bay. Yes, she is putting about, for I see her plainly now."

"Her topmasts are housed, and she has only jib and mainsail set, and these are reefed down."

"There! she has gone about again—I do not understand her maneuver, unless some one has been swept overboard, and they are trying to pick him up."

"My God! what if it should be my boy!"

The words came in a wail from the white lips of the woman, and sinking upon her knees she bowed her head upon the lower rail in an agony of doubt and dread.

Jeanette seized the glass and bent it upon the yacht.

"Madam, the yacht is now headed for home," she said.

Again Lucille glanced through it, and then cried excitedly:

"Yes, I see her!"

"She is headed for home now."

"But does she bring my boy, or do they come to tell me that he is lost?"

It was some time before she became calm, and then the words of the octoroon maid startled her:

"Little master is safe, madam, my mistress, for I see him distinctly."

Quickly Lucille seized the glass, gave one long look and exclaimed:

"I see him! thank God!" and then she knelt while the yacht came rushing homeward.

She saw that she could not make the harborage without running past the mansion and beat-

ing in, and as she went about she beheld the colors run up and dipped to her.

Up went the tower flag, which had been lowered on account of the gale, and the salute was returned with a will.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE RECOGNITION.

"JEANETTE!"

Lucille Revello spoke almost sternly.

"Yes, madam."

"There is a stranger in the yacht."

"Madam?"

"There is a stranger in the yacht, a white man, and in uniform; but I cannot see his face."

"I see some one there, also, my mistress."

"Who can it be?"

The octaroon shrugged her shoulders in a way that plainly said:

"I do not know."

"It must have been he whom they picked up, when they were backing and filling so in the lower bay."

"Yes, lady."

The situation of the stranger in the yacht was such that he could not be distinctly seen from the tower.

But yet his presence there was certain, and Lucille wondered who he could be.

"Unless he picked him up at sea, my son would surely not bring a stranger here."

"No, madam."

"Well, I must go down to meet my boy, after his escape from death, and yet I cannot reproach him for going forth on such a day."

"I wonder who that stranger is," and with this Lucille left the tower just as Jeanette remarked, as she lingered behind:

"I think, Madam Lucille, that the stranger is hurt, for he does not even move."

"It may be, though I trust not."

"I must find out, however, if he needs aid."

Descending from the tower, Lucille walked out to meet Reginald, who had hastened up the hill as fast as he could go.

"My boy!" cried the happy mother, as she clasped the lad to her heart.

"I feared I would never see you again in life."

"Why, mother, I was perfectly safe, for the yacht behaved splendidly, and then Mack is the best sailor I ever saw, for he saved us."

"But why did you go in such bad weather, Reginald?"

"I didn't think it would be so bad, mother, until we had passed Point Clear, and then I am more than glad I went, for we saved the life of a splendid fellow, one who would not have lasted much longer had we not picked him up, for his arm was broken and he was clinging to a piece of a boat, mother."

"My son, who is this unfortunate man?" asked Lucille, in a serious tone.

"Mother, I know nothing of him more than that we picked him up in the lower bay, and his arm is broken, and he is very weak, while he wears the uniform of a captain in the navy."

"He did not tell you his name?"

"No, mother, we have been a little too busy to talk, for it was a hard fight for life against that storm."

"Just see now how savage the wind is up here under the lee of the forest," and the lad pointed to the trees, which were swaying wildly, some of them nearly bent double.

"Yes, it is a bitter storm; but you say this stranger is a naval captain?"

"Yes, mother."

"Well, I can not refuse shelter and care to one in distress, so I will have a room prepared for him at once."

"The best room, mother, for he's a splendid fellow, I know, and full of pluck."

"You will see him, of course, mother?"

"Must I do so, my son?" and a pained look crossed the beautiful face of Lucille Revello.

"Yes, mother, for my sake."

"I will meet him and give him welcome, then, Reginald," said the woman, and she walked quickly back to the mansion to have preparations made for the stranger, while Reginald turned to meet the party coming up the hill with the injured officer.

They came slowly, and the officer lay at full length upon the stretcher, formed of a hammock and four oars, one crossing the others at each end, and thus giving a good swing to the stretcher, which four negroes were bearing.

"Well, sir, you will soon be comfortable, and let me tell you that Mack is our plantation doctor, and can set a bone as well as any one, though we can send over to Mobile for a surgeon, if you wish," said the boy.

"Oh, no, my brave young friend, for if Mack can set a bone just half as well as he can handle a craft in a storm, I shall need no other surgeon."

"It is exhaustion that prevents my walking, and being so long in the water; but I will quickly rally, I am sure."

They had now reached the front of the mansion, the tower entrance, and there stood Lucille Revello to receive her unexpected guest, one whom misfortune had thrown upon her hospitality.

She was clad in a robe of deep black, and she wore her favorite ornaments of rubies, while she looked very beautiful, though still a little pale.

The officer was a man of thirty-five, perhaps, though upon each temple the hair was beginning to silver.

He possessed a fine form, and his face was a striking one, for it was exceedingly good-looking, at the same time being full of fearless determination and intelligence.

He glanced up as he neared the mansion and said:

"Halt, men, for perhaps I can walk now, as I do not wish to be carried if I can do so."

The men came to a halt, and slowly he got off of the stretcher, and found that he was ready to stand at least.

Just then the mistress of Red Cliffs came forward and their eyes met.

"Archer Dean!" came in a cry from the lips of the woman, while by the officer her name was quickly spoken:

"Lucille Lomax!"

CHAPTER XLVI.

FRIENDS OF "LANG SYNE."

THE recognition of the man and the woman was mutual.

Each saw in the other a friend of auld lang syne.

The memory of the man flew back to a time over a dozen years before when he had met in New Orleans beautiful Lucille Lomax and loved her.

He had shown his love in many ways, even though he had not told her so in so many words and asked her to be his wife.

He had believed too that she was far from indifferent to him, nay, regarded him with a feeling akin to love.

Then came his orders to sail in his vessel in great haste, and they parted.

He was a junior lieutenant then, and she but a maiden of seventeen.

With her parents she went to their summer home on the shores of Mobile Bay, and once after he had visited her there, when his vessel was in port.

He was then upon the eve of telling her of his love and asking her father for her hand, when he saw his vessel standing out of the harbor, and she had a signal up calling him aboard.

He had obeyed at once, but he had said at parting:

"When next we meet, Lucille, I have a secret to tell you, yet it is one you must already know."

When next they met?

How strange that next meeting.

What changes had come over both of them.

True to his promise he had sought her out, but to learn of her mysterious disappearance, and rumor had reached him that she had fled from her home and her parents with an unknown adventurer of the sea.

Years passed and again they met.

It was when he commanded the schooner-of-war Spiteful and was anchored in the harbor of Vera Cruz.

It was reported to him that a youth had boarded the schooner by swimming and desired to see him.

The youth was admitted to his cabin, a handsome, dashing lad of fifteen he appeared, as he stood before the young commander of the Spiteful dripping wet.

But that youth had a story to tell.

He had made himself known not as a boy, but as Lucille Lomax, his lost sweetheart of years before.

She told her story then, how the Mexican cruiser Rattlesnake, then in port, was secretly a buccaner, and that her commander, Captain Rudolph Revello, was her husband.

She made no excuses for giving up her old love, for marrying a man she now said was a buccaner.

She simply said that she could lure her husband to put to sea, that the schooner should go first and lie in wait for him, and that Archer Dean could attack the Mexican, capture him and he would find that his prisoner was a pirate, a man living a double life.

And when Archer Dean had said he would obey, overboard went the woman to swim back to her husband's vessel, which she had risked her life to betray for some reason known only to herself and which she would not tell even her old lover.

The Spiteful had put to sea, been caught in a tornado and wrecked, her crew who survived being picked up by a vessel going to China, so that it was more than a year before Archer Dean again set foot in his native land.

Then he had heard of the sailing of the Mexican cruiser Rattlesnake soon after he had, and that she had never been heard of after, all supposing that she was caught in the tornado and lost.

Thus his lost love he had believed to be at the bottom of the sea, when suddenly he came upon her face to face in her own home as the fair recluse of Red Cliffs.

To her son he owed his life, for now he knew

what the strange resemblance in the boy was that had so startled him.

He had gained another vessel, for he stood high on the records of naval achievements, and a short while before had been promoted to a captaincy and placed in command of a schooner-of-war far superior to the Spiteful which had gone down in the tornado.

Believing that Lucille Lomax, as he knew her, to be dead, he had mourned her as such, and pondered over the strange life she had led, and her leaving home and all to become a pirate bride.

What it meant he could not understand, and yet in his heart he had forgiven her that she had refused his love to become the wife of another, for he believed that there was some reason for it which he could not understand, that had swayed her to do as she had.

Now again they met.

Was her husband's bones far below the waters of the Gulf, or was he alive?

She was no longer playing the part of a youth, a cabin-boy, but was more beautiful than ever in her widow's weeds.

Now he was her guest, the guest of the mysterious recluse, the lady of Red Cliffs, of whom he had heard so much when in port and yet of whom no one knew anything.

Such were the thoughts that flashed through the mind of the officers who had thus strangely again crossed the path of the lady of Red cliffs.

CHAPTER XLVII.

A GUEST AT RED CLIFFS.

WHEN the recognition of the two, and their greeting, was over, the woman was first to regain her composure, though she had become very pale.

She turned quickly to two of the negroes and bade them aid Captain Dean to his room, she leading the way.

The room was a charming one, large, airy and luxuriously furnished.

Its windows overlooked the bay in front, and up and down the coast as well.

A fire burned on the spacious hearth, to take off the chill and dampness caused by the storm, and a vase held a quantity of rare flowers, hastily culled by Jeanette.

"I trust, Captain Dean, that your injury is not so severe as my son has told me," said Lucille, as they placed the officer upon a lounge, for he was too weak to stand alone.

"Only a broken arm that will soon be well, Mrs.—Mrs.—"

He hesitated and she said for him:

"Revello."

"Ah yes, Mrs. Revello."

"I suffer, however, from exhaustion, caused by being some twelve hours in the water, but I will soon rally. I know, in such charming quarters."

"All that we can do for you we will, and I shall hope you will make yourself perfectly at home, while I will send the yacht over to Mobile for a surgeon as soon as the storm lessens in severity."

"No, no, I beg of you first to let me call in the services of that gallant black captain of your son's yacht, for I have faith in his skill."

"I am here, master, to do your bidding, sir," and Mack came forward, having quickly changed his drenched clothing for dry.

"You understand something of setting an arm, your young master said?"

"Yes, sir. I am a black doctor," said Mack, with a smile.

"Well, my man, so long as you do not practice the black art upon me I am content."

"Come, see just how I am stove up."

Lucille Revello had left the room, but a negro now entered bringing dry clothing for the officer, which he explained was new and intended for the yacht's crew, yet would serve, his mistress hoped, until the uniform of Captain Dean could be put in condition again.

Reginald also came in to see Mack set the officer's arm, and watched the proceeding with the deepest interest, while he said:

"You have got heaps of pluck, sir, for you didn't wince."

"It would not mend matters if I did, Master Reginald, so I have schooled myself to the philosophy of taking things as they come, and never crying over spilt milk."

"Well done, Mack, for my own surgeon aboard ship could not have done better."

"Now I will take a stimulant, eat a little something, and I think I am good for an all-night's sleep," said Captain Dean cheerily.

Half an hour after he sunk to sleep, and he did not move his position until he saw Mack standing by the side of his bed.

"How long have I been asleep, Mack?"

"All night, sir."

"What! is it morning?"

"Yes, sir; eight o'clock, and the mistress sent me to rouse you, as she was becoming anxious at your long sleep."

"Well, it has done me a world of good, for I am all right, and the arm is not very painful—What! my clothes are ready for me, and my shoes, too!"

"Well, aid me to dress, and I will do myself the honor of meeting your mistress and her handsome son at breakfast."

He tottered a little at first, but a stimulant revived him, and Mack soon had him dressed, when he aided him into the breakfast-room.

The storm had blown over, and the sun was shining brightly he saw, as he gazed from the window.

As he stood there Reginald entered, and gave him a cheery good-morning, while he said:

"I am so glad to see you up, Captain Dean, for we did not expect it."

"Mother will join us in a moment."

"And it is to you, my brave boy, that I owe my life, for I saw you aloft with your glass, and know that you sighted me, while, at the risk of your life and your vessel, you stood by until you rescued me."

"Let me tell you how deeply I appreciate your goodness."

"Oa, it was Mack did it, sir, for I could have done nothing without him," was the modest reply of the lad.

Just then Mrs. Revello swept into the room.

She was dressed in a long, trained robe of soft black Chinese silk, and its somberness was only relieved by a necklace, bracelet, earrings, and a ring of splendid pearls, she having discarded her rubies for them.

She grasped the hand of her guest in almost silence, and then touched the bell to order breakfast served, as though glad to have something to do.

The meal passed off pleasantly, Captain Dean and Reginald doing most of the talking, Mrs. Revello silent but attentive.

A journeying to the piazza afterward an easy-chair was placed for the officer, while Reginald said:

"Now, Captain Dean, the wind is fair for a run over to Mobile and back, and I wish to know if there is anything I can do for you there, sir, for I am going to sail to the harbor?"

"Yes, I will have to ask you to take me over, for my vessel is there."

"That, you must not consider, Captain Dean, for you are wholly unequal to the task; but if you desire, my son will visit your vessel and relieve them of any anxiety regarding you," said Mrs. Revello firmly.

"Thus urged I shall still remain your guest," was the low reply of the officer.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

HIS EXPLANATION.

WHEN he saw that he was not an unwelcome guest at Red Cliff's, for he was by no means able to take the run across the bay, Archer Dean was indeed glad to remain, and so said.

He felt sure that Reginald's going to Mobile was merely to serve him, and so he sent word over to the lieutenant commanding his vessel of his mis-hap, telling the lad all to make known to the officer, and to request him to run over for him within a few days.

When Reginald took his departure he hastened down to the wharf and soon after the yacht was seen flying out from under the shadow of the cliffs and laying her course for Mobile, six leagues away.

Then the silence was broken between Mrs. Revello and the captain by her remark:

"You did not tell us, Captain Dean, how it was you came to be adrift on the wreckage in the bay?"

"True, and I will tell you now, Mrs. Revello."

"But let me first say what a beautiful home you have made for yourself here, for out upon the waters it looks like a lordly castle and few would believe that it was built of hewn logs."

"It was all the work of my slaves, sir."

"I recall the old homestead here of the long ago, but I am glad that you have returned here to live," and the officer saw by the change that had swept over Lucille's face that his reference to the past had moved her.

"I thought I was to hear of your adventure," she said:

"Oh, yes, it was in this way:

"I am stationed in the Gulf, you know."

"No, I did not know."

He looked disappointed, but answered:

"Yes, Mobile is my home port, and I go there for repairs, orders, and to take my prizes."

"There have been some bold smugglers in the bay of late, and I got upon the track of their retreat, but found that I could not venture there in my vessel."

"A sailing vessel of smaller size would attract attention also, so I decided to go there in my barge."

"It was rigged for two masts and a bowsprit, and was a fair sailor, while it would hold thirty men if needed."

"I decided to carry twenty, at least, as I expected to find there fully that many in the smugglers' band."

"I went down the bay the night before until I reached a small river on the right-hand shore where I could hide until the following night, and we camped ashore."

"Just at dark I set sail across Mobile Bay to run for the lagoon in Bon Lecours Bay, where the smugglers had their retreat."

"We had a bright moonlight night and a fair

breeze, and I held in under sail as near the shore as I dared venture, when I took down my canvas and put out my ten oars, having them muffled."

"It had now come into view, and I had to face a head wind which was steadily increasing in violence."

"Then it began to cloud up and the seas commenced to run high, giving us all we could do to make good headway."

"Suddenly a light was descried off the port bow, and my glass showed it to be a large schooner of a very peculiar rig."

"She was an armed vessel, and driving along like the wind, heading for the Gulf."

"I believed her to be at first some American cruiser, then took her for a foreign war-ship, and at last felt sure she was a pirate."

"A pirate?"

"So I believed, and am now convinced that I was right, though she was a craft I never before saw in these waters."

"When was this, Captain Dean?"

"Night before last."

"Ah!"

"I felt sure that they saw us, for they changed their course, and feeling that they were crowding me too close, I hailed them."

"No answer came to my hail."

"On she rushed, however, directly for us, and I loudly hailed again, showed a light and ordered her to keep off."

"Her commander did not heed, and seeing that she meant to run us down, I ordered the men to back water hard, which they did."

"The sea was very wild now, and I dared not go about, and only hoped the schooner would pass us by."

"But vain the hope, for she headed directly for us, and the next moment, in spite of all we could do, struck us fairly amidships, cutting the barge completely in twain, and shattering it into a dozen pieces."

"As she swept on, I heard mocking, wild laughter from her commander, who sprung upon the mizzen shrouds to note the damage he had done."

"The demon" came almost fiercely from the lips of Lucille Revello.

"I was thrown into the sea with the others, and found myself with a broken arm, grasping the gunwale of the boat."

"But I discovered that the part of the wreckage I had would uphold me, and I aided others upon it, while still more clung to the other parts of the boat."

"And the schooner?"

"Swept on out of sight, leaving us to our fate."

"And then?"

"The storm gathered steadily, driving us about the bay, and at dawn all was wild about us and no land in sight from our low position on the wreck, so I knew that we must be in the Lower Bay."

"Several of my men had become exhausted, and though we tried hard to uphold them, dropped into the sea to die."

"The others were not in sight, on the different parts of the wreck, and I felt that we must all perish when the storm broke in fury upon us."

"Well, one by one my men dropped off from exhaustion, or were torn off, while I, with one arm useless, still clung on."

"At last, as I was about to give up, the yacht came in sight, and to your brave boy I owe my life."

CHAPTER XLIX.

HER STORY.

LUCILLE REVELLO had listened to the story of the officer, as to why he had been found adrift in the bay, with the deepest attention.

When at last he said that it was to Reginald that he owed his life, she said with deep fervor:

"Thank Heaven that you owe your life to my boy."

Reginald had told her of the rescue, and she had felt that but for his going aloft, and his keen eyes, the officer would have been drowned.

"Do you think any one of the others were saved?" she asked, after a moment of silence.

"I fear not, Mrs. Revello, for how could they be unless picked up, and there was no vessel in sight."

"With me there were six men, and one by one, as I told you, they gave up."

"I have an iron constitution, great strength and endurance, and then I lashed myself to the wreckage with my sash and sword-belt."

"Had my arm not been broken I would have felt no anxiety, expecting to drift ashore, or if carried out toward the Gulf near enough to the land to swim to it."

"But, crippled as I was my fate was assured but for your gallant boy, and his brave crew of blacks."

"I am glad to hear you say so; but I hope that others were also saved."

"Sincerely do I hold the same hope; but I fear their doom is sealed, Mrs. Revello."

"It may be, must be, in fact, though I hope even against hope, for such was always my nature."

"It is that which has upheld me my whole life, for were it otherwise I would have long ago been dead."

"Yes, I remember, and I too have hoped, though I never expected again to see you upon earth."

"Do you remember our last meeting, Lucille?"

She started as he called her by her girlhood name, but answered:

"It was in Vera Cruz Harbor."

"Yes, upon my schooner, the Spiteful."

"I remember."

He wished to urge her on to speak of herself, and so said:

"I obeyed you to the letter that night, when, disguised as a cabin-boy, you swam to my vessel, made yourself known, and told me what you did."

"And then?"

"I went out to sea, was caught in the tornado, and my vessel was wrecked."

"Yes, I afterward heard that your schooner was lost in the Gulf, with all on board."

"It was so badly handled by the tornado that I was forced to leave the craft and take to our boats."

"I had lost many men washed into the sea, and I feared the boats would swamp also."

"But they were our only hope."

"The boats were soon separated, mine was picked up days after by a China-bound clipper, and it was long before I again found my way back to my own land."

"Then I discovered that two others of the boats had been picked up, so that with my vessel I lost two-thirds of my crew."

"The third who survive are with me now, brave fellows, upon the Spitfire, my present vessel."

"You have been indeed fortunate."

"Yes, in winning rank and escaping death," he said significantly.

She was silent, and so he asked:

"Now, Lucille, will you not tell me how it was that you escaped death in the Mexican cruiser, for I took pains, as soon as I learned, to find out about her, and heard that she, too, had foundered in the same tornado that had wrecked me."

"Yes, the cruiser went down in that storm, a fitting fate for a vessel that was sailing under an honest flag and leading a life of outlawry."

"And Captain Revello?"

"Escaped."

"Ah!"

"He and his slave escaped in a life boat."

"With you also?"

"No."

"What?"

"I was recognized by him in my boy's attire, and he knew that I had plotted to bring him to justice, and thus avenge myself."

"Indeed!"

"So he left me alone upon the wreck."

"To die?"

"Yes."

"The monster!"

"He was even more than that."

"I am listening, Lucille."

"I did not perish, as he had hoped, but escaped, was picked up at sea by a smuggler, and he took me to Revello's secret island retreat."

"From there I sailed with my boy, my faithful Linda his nurse, and one other, the one whom I had impersonated as a cabin-boy."

"And you left those on the island who had been pirates under Revello?"

"Yes."

"And you know how to find this retreat?"

"I do."

"And will direct me there?"

"No."

"Why, may I ask?"

"They did me no harm."

"They are pirates."

"Granted."

"Well?"

"For years they were my friends, and I would never betray them."

"No, let them go, for Revello brought their crimes upon them."

"And Revello?"

"He is dead."

"You know this?"

"Yes."

"There is no doubt?"

"None."

"Give me proof, please?"

"I sought to avenge my wrongs, I sought his death, and, Archer Dean, I have seen Rudolph Revello dead, have gazed upon him lying lifeless at my feet."

"Is that not proof sufficient?"

She had sprung to her feet as she spoke, and her eyes fairly blazed with the deep emotion that nearly overwhelmed her.

"Yes, it is proof sufficient, and fervently do I thank Heaven that you have been avenged."

"Do you know what I had to avenge?"

"No."

"Would you care to know?"

"If you care to tell."

"I will tell you, for I feel that I owe it to you, to myself, to explain why I became the wife of an outlaw, one whom you knew, by my own confession to you, was a buccaneer in secret, though he was known as an honorable man and officer of the Mexican Navy."

"You never married him, Lucille, believing him to be other than an honorable man, that I am sure of."

"I thank you, Captain Dean, for that kindly expressed confidence in me."

"I have never lost my regard for you, Lucille," he said, tenderly.

She quickly broke in upon this strain by saying:

"The truth of that marriage I have told to no one, for when I came back home to confess all, I came to see my father die by the hand of the man I had wedded."

"Lucille!"

"Yes, it is true, for my father had gone mad, and beholding the man who had wronged me, doubtless attacked him; but he who could have crushed that poor old man with his giant strength, shot him dead in his tracks."

"My God! he deserved a terrible retribution for that deed, Lucille."

"And his retribution was a terrible one," was the low, earnest reply of the woman.

CHAPTER I.

THE PIRATE'S WIFE.

LUCILLE REVELLO had spoken with the greatest calmness.

She talked like one who had known all there was of life's bitterness and had schooled herself to the philosophy of accepting the situation as it was, of meeting danger and sorrow with a fearless, calm front.

She had, in meeting with Archer Dean, had recalled to her a past which she had looked upon as buried, her girlhood's love for the young naval officer.

He had told her his story, each had believed the other dead, and she would lay bare her heart to him in all its despair.

She had vowed to herself that she would retire from the world, live in the seclusion of a nun, and devote her life to her boy.

But here came before her Archer Dean, and he came as though a destiny had brought him to her home.

He came, snatched from death by the act of her own son, a boy just stepping across the threshold into his teens.

Could she turn her back upon the man thus coming to her, led by Fate?

Could she allow him to think ill of her, for would he not so think?

Should she not explain to him at least all that she had suffered, her struggles and despair, her aims and hopes?

She thought that she should do so in justice to him, in justice to herself.

And so she went on in that even manner natural to her to say:

"It was when my father fell by Revello's hand that I vowed vengeance against him."

"You then lay in port, a lieutenant commanding the Spiteful, and Captain Louis Dudley was in command of the brig-of-war Battle Bird."

"Revello's vessel lay up in an inlet near Spanish Fort refitting, while I remained here at the cottage with my little boy."

"But I sought revenge, and, disguised as a man, I ran over by night in a life-boat, although it was storming, sought you in your cabin and told you where you could find the private craft known as the Red Rapier."

"Ha! now I recall the incident, for Captain Dudley was dining with me that night."

"We took you at your word, sailed in chase of the pirate the next morning and he ran out ahead of us, making his escape in spite of our heavy fire upon him."

"Yes, he found out in some way you intended searching for him, sent word for Reginald and myself to come off in a boat as he passed the cliffs, picked us up and, as you say, escaped."

"But why need I dwell longer upon the past, for it is so full of bitter memories to me?"

"Let us feel that the future at least will be bright for you, Lucille."

"Heaven grant it for my boy's sake."

"But do you know you have not told me yet how it was that you fled from home to marry Revello?"

"Have I not?"

"Not a word."

"Ah me, it is a story I hate to dwell upon."

"Make it known to me at least."

"To you?"

"Yes, tell me all now, Lucille, and then let us say together that the dead past shall bury its dead."

"It would be better perhaps, for you would know better why I did what I did, committed the crime I was guilty of."

"The crime?"

He spoke in a startled way.

"Yes, for it was a crime to wed that man."

"But he alarmed me, told me a story of my father being secretly the chief of a band of smugglers, and that he had tracked him there to his home."

"Oh, how false!"

"Yes, it was so false; but his story frightened me terribly, for he said that he had orders from his Government to capture and hang my father."

"Well, at last he said that I might save him, for the United States Government knew nothing of my father's guilt, and if I would go to Mexico he would gain from the *Junta* there a pardon which I could bring back with me."

"He professed to love me devotedly, and—Well, in the end, to save my father, I yielded and became his wife, for we were married in Mobile."

"You must know, then, Captain Dean, that he showed the cloven foot and professed his love for me as an excuse for his act."

"But it was too late, then; I could not retrace my steps, could not blot out my act."

"The die was cast and I accepted the situation."

"My little boy was born, and I became a rover with—my husband."

"After years had passed he yielded to my entreaties to bring me home with our child."

"I have told you the result, and then I discovered that he meant to desert us and enter into a marriage with a lovely Mexican girl, which, with me alive, would be but a mockery."

"Then I acted, and, as I told you, I saw him dead at my feet."

"There is no more to tell, Captain Dean, unless I say that he thought that he hid his treasure, his ill-gotten gold away from me, but was not successful in doing so, for I saw him bury it by night, here on these grounds, my inheritance from my parents, and I now possess, for my son, the wealth he hid away."

"I believe I have told you all, said all that there is to say, and that you understand me better now, know my wrongs, my suffering, my despair, and that my only hope for the future is for my noble little son."

"Let us drop the past now, will you not?" and she turned a gaze upon him so full of sorrow and pleading that it troubled him to the heart to behold it.

CHAPTER II.

THE CONFESSION.

FOR some moments after the woman ceased speaking, Captain Dean did not reply.

He sat like a statue gazing out over the sunlit waters, still turbulent from the wild

lashing they had gotten the day and night before.

As for Lucille, she glanced at him in a fitful, half-frightened way, like a child who expected a refusal for some deed of wrong.

At last Archer Dean arose and approached her where she sat near him upon the piazza.

She half shrunk from him, but he appeared not to notice it and standing before her said in a low, impressive tone:

"Lucille, I have heard with deepest interest your strange story of wrongs, wrongs which the death of that man justly righted, for he met but a deserved retribution, you had only a deserved revenge."

"You have said to me to let the past be dropped, its little memories be buried, its sorrows buried in the grave of forgetfulness."

"So be it, Lucille, for so shall it be upon my part."

"But there is a present, Lucille, and a future."

"Just now you and I live in the present and the future lies before us."

"Behind us we can cast the clouds if you only will, and the sunshine will be before us."

"You know, Lucille, that I have loved you since the day we first met."

"You know that no other woman, in all these years, has won me away from that allegiance to my girl sweetheart."

"You understand that I never condemned, never believed a word that came to me, but loyal to the woman I loved, mourned her as dead."

"Now, a strange fatality has brought us together again after all these years."

"I am no longer young, for see these silver threads upon my temple mark the putting off of my youth."

"You are more beautiful than ever, in spite of all that you have been made to suffer."

"You never told me in the bygone that you loved me, and yet I was vain enough to believe that you did."

"Was I mistaken, Lucille?"

He waited for a reply, but none came.

"Did you ever love me, Lucille?"

Still no reply.

"Answer me, Lucille."

"Yes."

"You did love me?"

"Yes."

"When did you cease loving me?"

"I never ceased loving you."

"Do you mean it?"

"I do."

"In the time that has gone by you have been true to me?"

"I was true to my love for my father, and so did what I did; but I never forgot you, never ceased to love you."

"I was true to the man I married, vile as he was, yet between us there ever rose your image, and I knew that I had only loved you in all my life."

She spoke with a frankness he could not doubt, but he wished to hear her say more, and so he asked:

"And now, Lucille?"

"What do you mean?"

"Can you love me now?"

"I can."

"And will?"

"Yes."

"And do?"

"Yes, I do."

He took her hand and drew her gently toward him, while he again asked:

"And in your own good time, Lucille, you will become my wife?"

"If you will take me, whom you know as you now know me, Archer Dean, I will become your wife," she said, humbly.

"Heaven bless you forever, my own Lucille," he said, in an impassioned tone, and then, drawing her closer to him, he imprinted upon her forehead a kiss.

Then he resumed his seat, and a long silence fell between them.

At last she broke the silence.

"Archer, for I may so call you now?"

"Yes, as you did in the long ago."

"I have something more to tell you."

"Yes, Lucille."

"You were run down night before last by a strange schooner?"

"I was."

"I know just what that vessel was."

"You?"

"Yes."

"How do you know?"
 "Her commander had just left here when he ran down your barge."
 "I thought that you were a recluse, that you saw no one who came here."
 "So I have been."

"But when I moved here the man who commanded the lugger in which we came was an Indian."

"He was not like others of his race, for he appeared to have a noble nature, was certainly a thorough sailor, and as courtly as a Spanish cavalier."

"I could not but feel kindly toward him, for he was ever so respectful to me and so kind."

"He had a crew only negroes, and they obeyed him perfectly and seemed to regard him as though he was their king."

"We picked up at sea a deserted slave-ship, or rather deserted by all except her human freight who were prisoners below deck."

"The vessel had been swept by a tornado, her officers and crew washed into the sea and her masts torn out of her."

"Well, to make a long story short, that vessel was towed to a retreat I knew of and where I hid her, while the poor captives are now contented as my slaves on this plantation."

"You shall see them for yourself ere you go back to your vessel."

"You shall see that they were taken from barbarism, and if in slavery are far better off than when in the wilds of Africa."

"Well, this Indian captain, who had a taint of negro blood confessed in his veins, left me with an avowal of love."

"I know not how he did so, but two days ago he came to anchor in the little haven under the cliffs."

"His vessel was there when the dawn came, and at his peak floated the flag of Morocco."

"Are you interested, Archer?"

"Most deeply," was the reply.

CHAPTER LII.

THE PLEDGE.

"As you are interested, Captain Dean, I will continue my story, for much may come of it, and I am glad to feel as I now do, that I may depend upon your aid."

"You may certainly do so, Lucille, without reservation."

"Well, this vessel was there at anchor, and a messenger, a huge negro in Turkish costume and speaking French, came to the house to know if I would receive his master?"

"The Indian?"

"No."

"Who then?"

"The Indian captain that was, but now the Moorish noble Rais Selim Ben Alvah."

"Ah!"

"I refused, of course."

"Yes."

"Then Reginald wished to board the foreign ship, and so I consented to allow him to do so."

"I hope you made no mistake."

"No, for I discovered who the man was."

"Your Indian lover?"

"Yes."

"In the disguise of a Moor?"

"Exactly."

"Well?"

"Reginald went on board, carrying fruits, wines and other things, and to explain that his mother was a recluse, and that he was the only master here."

"I understand."

"He remained to dine with the Moor, and was on board for hours."

"At last he returned, and was quite fascinated with the man."

"He told me much about him, and the more he told me the more I grew suspicious of him."

"I was sure that I recognized the schooner, and I had taken an idea that the commander was no Moor."

"You are very far-seeing, Lucille."

"Well, at night I took a stroll upon the cliff, as is my wont to do before retiring, and there I was joined by the schooner's commander."

"The scamp."

"Then I recognized him, and in fact he confessed that he was Beit Despard, the Indian captain."

"He confessed that he had sought to win a fortune, and thus win me."

"By piracy?"

"No."

"How, then?"

"That he did not make known to me."

"He confessed that he had taken the schooner from her hiding-place in the lagoon, had fitted her out, secured a crew of blacks and had come to ask me to be his wife."

"The villain."

"Oh, he meant well, but then felt that gold would buy me, and he thought he had won fame in being metamorphosed into a Moorish captain."

"He had also purchased a home in Cuba, or said so, fit for a queen to live in, and there he wished me to go as his bride."

"And your answer?"

"Could I have but one answer?"

"Hardly."

"I told him that he was wrong in supposing that he could win my love, that I did not and never could love him."

"I felt for him, and meant to be kind."

"But he did not take your refusal kindly?"

"No, indeed, for the red devil in his nature broke out, and made a madman of him."

"He made bitter, cruel threats, though he made no effort to harm me."

"But he vowed that he would turn pirate—"

"I guess he already was one."

"It may be so, but I can hardly believe it."

"And then?"

"He vowed to show no mercy to man, woman or child, and he would one day make me bitterly regret that I had discarded his love."

"And then?"

"With this terrible threat he left me, and I stood watching his vessel as she sailed away."

"I watched her out of sight, and what you tell me convinces me that it was his craft that ran you down."

"That was the craft."

"His running down your barge, his mocking laughter as you heard it, proves that he has begun well to carry out his threats."

"So it does, Lucille."

"Of course I felt dread only for my boy."

"I believed that upon him would that man's vengeance fall."

"I was so worried that at first I decided to fortify my home and drill my people to defend it."

"This I dismissed as unwise, and then I decided to visit Mobile, make known to the commander of some cruiser there just what the schooner was, and send him in chase of him."

"The next morning Reginald went on his cruise in the yacht, your rescue followed, and now you know all."

"And glad am I to know it, Lucille, for this man must do you no harm."

"Or harm my boy?"

"No, he must be hunted from off the sea."

"And you will do it?" she asked eagerly.

"You have said that you will be my wife some day?"

"Yes, gladly."

"Well, Lucille, listen to my pledge."

"Your pledge?"

"Yes, for I pledge you my word not to claim you as my bride until I have hunted down this Moor, Indian captain, pirate, or whatever he may be."

"I will see to it that he never brings harm upon you or yours."

"I have a splendid vessel, fleet as the wind, well armed, and manned with a crew I can depend upon to die at the guns if I give the command."

"I will, as soon as I am able, refit my schooner for the cruise after this Red-skin Rover, and when I have hunted him down then only will I return to claim from you your promise because I have kept my pledge."

"But see, the whole morning has passed, and I see a sail coming out of the river yonder, and it must be the yacht."

"Yes, it is Reginald returning, and when you have left us I will tell him that he is to have a father whom he can love, for he is too young to know the secret that he is a

pirate's son," she said with something of her old bitterness.

"And he must never know," was Archer Dean's reply.

CHAPTER LIII.

A MIDNIGHT EXPEDITION.

THE sail descried was the little yacht, and, having a favorable breeze it ran rapidly across the bay toward the harbor under the cliffs.

As she drew near Reginald saw with his glass his mother and Captain Dean upon the piazza, and saluted them by dipping his flag.

It was just sunset when Reginald came bounding up the path to the house and kissing his mother affectionately said:

"Well, Captain Dean, I am glad to see you so well, sir."

"I went on board your schooner and she's a beauty I can tell you, and looks as if she could make a savage fight."

"I hope she will have the opportunity to try soon, Reginald."

"But did you see my lieutenant in command?"

"Oh yes, sir, and delivered your message."

"And had any of my poor fellows been heard of?"

"Yes, sir, seven of them on one piece of the barge, had been picked up by a coaster bound up the bay to Mobile."

"That is splendid news indeed!"

"They tried to make the skipper search for you and the others, but he was afraid he would be caught in the storm, so hastened on to port."

"He was wise at least."

"But I have more good news for you, sir, for three others drove ashore on another part of the barge, and made their way up to the town on foot, arriving on board the schooner just before I did."

"Better still."

"They all reported you as lost, sir, and there was great gloom on board: but I can tell you they were glad at the news I brought them."

"But I told the lieutenant you were safe and well, and he need not expect you until you had gotten much better."

"He wished to run over and see you, or at least send the surgeon; but I told him I would say as much to you and if you wished them I would sail over after them."

"That was right, my young friend," said Captain Dean, and he seemed much pleased with the result of the lad's visit to his vessel, for he added:

"Ten of my brave fellows saved, half the force I had with me, is far more than I could have hoped for."

Supper was now announced and Captain Dean seemed like a new man; for he walked unaided into the dining-room.

Thus the days went by until two weeks had passed and Captain Dean felt that he must return to his vessel.

His arm had knitted well, Mack having shown himself a good surgeon, and he had regained his former strength and felt that he would soon be himself again.

He had ridden about the country with Lucille and Reginald, sailed in the yacht and passed his days most delightfully, until at last he felt that his dream of bliss must be broken and he return to the stern duties of a sailor's life once more.

He had not yet given up his intention of warring upon the smugglers in their stronghold, against whom he now felt revenge for the loss of his men, as they were indirectly the cause.

Reginald heard the captain discussing the matter with his mother and so said:

"Why would the yacht not do, Captain Dean, for I could run you there any night, if you would get your men?"

"You, my son?" cried the mother in alarm.

"Oh, yes, mother, for it would be a good thing for me to go along, as you certainly do not wish to have me grow up like a girl, afraid of all danger."

This idea had not presented itself to Lucille Revello before, her only desire being to guard her boy from all dangers.

But the way in which Reginald put it convinced her that he was right, that he did not

wish to be any the less a brave youth on account of his mother's love for him wishing to shield him.

So she asked:

"What do you think, Captain Dean?"

"I think it would be just the thing, for Reginald could bring over in his yacht thirty of my men by night, and seeing the craft run down the bay, no suspicion would be caused of her intending an attack.

"If you will allow Reginald to go I will take the best of care of him, while he will share the honors of the expedition."

"He shall go, so arrange your plans between you," was the reply of Mrs. Revello.

And so it was arranged that Reginald should go over in his yacht, with a letter from Captain Dean to his lieutenant, asking him to send an officer and thirty men, well armed, back by the little vessel.

This was done that very night, for the captain wished to delay no longer, and the following day the yacht ran down the bay, the sailors from the cruiser in hiding in the cabin, for fear any curious eyes might be watching her from the shore.

She held on as though going out into the Gulf, but the moment darkness came on put about and laid her course for the head of Bon Lecours Bay.

It was midnight when she ran up the river, driven by a gentle breeze, and ranged alongside of a bank near the ruins of an old Spanish chapel, built several centuries ago.

The landing was made in silence, and then the yacht held on up the stream, under command of Reginald.

He had been shown the exact situation of the smugglers' retreat, and that he could get within a few hundred yards of it in the yacht, and reaching there was to open fire with the two guns, six-pounders, upon the camp, firing several shots, when he was to cease while the land force, under Captain Dean, creeping up in the rear, would charge into the camp, thus cutting off all retreat.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE ATTACK.

REGINALD felt very proud of his part in the midnight attack, and was determined to carry his orders out without a flaw.

The camp of the smugglers was around a bend in the river, and upon the left hand shore, hidden by a range of hills.

The yacht had to sail around the head while the sailors marched across, and arriving there they were to seek refuge while the guns opened.

On her way up the yacht was to stretch two chain cables across the narrow stream at different points, which would check the flight of the smugglers' vessels should they attempt it by water, and they were known to have several very fleet craft at the rendezvous.

The yacht gained her position, having stretched the two cables half a mile apart.

Mack and his black crew worked splendidly, and reaching the point for action the two guns of the yacht were run to starboard and being already loaded were aimed into the dense timber.

The reflection of lights among the tops showed that the camp-fires were flickering, and the smugglers suspected no foe to come upon them in their secure retreat.

"You fire that gun, Mack, and I will fire this one.

"Are you ready?" asked Reginald.

"All ready, little master."

"Fire!"

Bang! bang! went the guns, rendering a thousand echoes among the forest, startling the birds from their retreats, frightening bear, wolves and deer from their lairs to skurry away from the dread sound.

The shots struck plump into the smugglers' camp, and it was the first note of alarm, the first intimation that their rendezvous was known.

Above the yacht lay a group of vessels, moored along the shore, and upon them were a few of the outlaws.

Having giving the men in camp a surprise, and started a panic, Reginald carried out his other orders and opened fire upon the little outlaw fleet, which Captain Dean told him he would find there.

The shots went crashing in among the

boats, spreading havoc there, too, while the cheers of the cruiser's men were heard as they rushed into the camps, firing as they did so.

Awakened from sleep with men-of-war'smen in their retreat, the smugglers were fairly paralyzed with fear, and a number were shot down before any resistance was offered.

Then they made a rally, and fought for awhile, though at a disadvantage they soon realized, for they began quickly to cry for mercy.

All the while the fight raged in the camp, Reginald kept his guns pouring in iron shots upon the boats, so that those who sought to escape that way found it impossible to stand the deadly hail.

Suddenly from the shore rung out a loud voice, hailing:

"Ho, the yacht, ahoy!"

"Ay, ay, sir," called back Reginald's shrill voice.

"Cease firing, for the camp is ours.

"Move up in your vessel and lay aboard the smuggler craft!"

"Ay, ay, sir," answered Reginald, greatly elated at the part he was playing in the midnight combat.

So the yacht moved on up the stream, and as it approached the fleet huddled together, a voice called out:

"Don't fire on us!"

"We surrender!"

"Answer him, Mack, for my voice is not very impressive," said Reginald, with a light laugh.

"Ay, ay, sir, we will not fire if you surrender!" called out Mack, and the moment after the yacht glided alongside a large sloop, just as Captain Dean and half a dozen of his men ran upon the shore.

Thus the victory was complete, for the camp and all its plunder fell into the hands of the victors, while five small fleet vessels used in the outlaws' trade were taken, one of them loaded with smuggled booty to run up to the town.

Then there were some forty prisoners taken, while a dozen or more had been slain.

"They had a force double what I expected to find, Reginald, and it was well that we came in the yacht, for the victory is due to you," said Captain Dean as he grasped the hand of the brave lad.

There were prize crews at once put on board the little vessels, which were also loaded with plunder, and at daylight, with the outgoing tide they dropped down the stream led by the yacht, and with the prisoners in irons on her deck.

Up the bay before a stiff breeze they went and late in the afternoon ran up to an anchorage off the city, when Archer Dean went up to report his victory to the commandant of the port, while Reginald started homeward with his black crew in his yacht, anxious to relieve his mother's anxiety and inform her of the great fight against the smugglers and its result.

"You must tell your mother from me, Reginald, that you deserve the credit for the victory, and that I shall so report to the naval authorities."

"I thank you, Captain Dean, but I simply acted under your orders," modestly responded the lad.

"And acted so well that without your aid, with the force I would have had to contend with, we would have been beaten off, for the yacht and her guns gained the victory.

"Tell your mother also that I shall soon start upon my cruise in search of the Red-skin Rover, and hope before long to bring her a good report of my cruise.

"If I can run over before I sail I will do so; but if not, don't forget to keep a bright lookout for any strange vessels in port, and run over and report them to any cruiser that may be here.

"Now, good-by," and thus the two parted.

CHAPTER LV.

AN UNLOOKED-FOR OCCUPATION.

HAVING turned over his prisoners and plunder to a guard from his vessel, Captain Dean proceeded to report to the commandant of the port, for in those days there was always a Government officer in command of every seaport of importance.

He found the commandant in his quarters, and was greeted with the words:

"The very man I was going to send for, Captain Dean, for I desire to see you upon a matter of great importance."

"I am wholly at your service, Commandant Clemmons, as soon as I have made a report to you which I desire to do."

"Never mind the report now, for it will keep, and I am anxious to have you act quickly in what is to be done.

"I hope you have recovered from your injury, for I had your misfortune reported to me, and your lieutenant said that you were off rustivating somewhere, but would report for duty again to-day."

"I still wear my arm in a sling, sir, as you see, but it will give me no further trouble I think.

"May I ask how I can serve you?"

"Certainly, for, as I said, we must act promptly."

"I am ready, sir."

"I suppose you have heard of this mysterious house situated upon the other shore of the bay?"

"Yes, sir, if you refer to the house at Red Cliffs."

"Yes, that is the place."

"Well, commandant?"

"There has been erected there within the past two years a house that is, I am told, a perfect palace."

"Yes, sir."

"It was formerly the home of a New Orleans merchant, who went mad, I believe, from grief, and it has been purchased by a mysterious woman in black and made into a castle."

"Indeed, sir?"

"Yes; and she has several hundred slaves on the place, and pretends to manage a plantation."

"Pretends?"

"Yes, that is the word."

"How do you mean, sir?"

"She cares no more for her plantation than I do."

"She has thousands of acres there, I believe, several hundred slaves, her fields are in splendid cultivation and her house splendidly kept up, so I do not see where the pretension is in the face of the reality."

"Ah! you have heard of her, then?"

"I have, sir."

"What have you heard?"

"That she is a woman who has met with early sorrows and lives the life of a recluse, denying herself to all society and content in the society of her son."

"A boy?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who runs a yacht?"

"Yes, sir."

"It is all a blind, Dean."

"How do you mean?"

"That woman wears a fortune in precious stones."

"What if she does?"

"A great deal, indeed."

"From whom do you get your information, may I ask, sir?"

"I have a letter here from New Orleans, and I will show it to you, for it tells me that the woman is leading a double life."

"It is false, sir."

"How do you know?"

"Such is my opinion; but show me the letter, please."

The commandant took from his valise a letter and read aloud as follows:

"Sir:—

"I have to report to you that the woman who dwells upon the eastern shore of Mobile Bay, is leading a double life.

"She is supposed to be a recluse from the world, possessing riches and carrying on her plantation, alone with her son who has a yacht, though he is hardly more than a boy of thirteen.

"The truth is that the plantation is a blind, and the slaves are kept for the same purpose, for the place is the retreat of both pirates and smugglers, and the boy's yacht is used to carry plunder to Mobile, Pensacola and New Orleans and dispose of it.

"The woman wears gems worth a fortune and she is secretly the head of this outlaw trade.

"Put a spy upon her and you will discover the truth of my accusation.

"When you have done so you will know me as I am, but now I am compelled to subscribe myself only as

"THE UNKNOWN."

The face of Archer Dean grew pale and stern as the commandant read this letter, and when he had finished it, asked exultantly:

"Now what do you think of that?"

"It is a tissue of falsehoods from beginning to end, and a secret communication not worthy of consideration."

"I deem differently."

"I know differently, Commandant Clemmons, and I brand the letter as false throughout."

"Upon what grounds?"

"Upon the grounds that it was the boy who saved my life at the risk of his vessel and all on board."

"Upon the grounds that it is at that house that I have been lying ill the past few weeks, and most tenderly cared for."

"I have seen that the fields are cultivated to the highest degree, that the negroes do work and work well, that the woman is a recluse and receives no visitors, and more, that it was her son who carried her upon an expedition against the smugglers of Bon Lecours, and enabled me to gain a complete victory over them."

"It was to make my report to you, sir, that I came here now. And let me tell you that I have five small vessels prizes, a hundred thousand dollars in booty, forty prisoners, and I buried a dozen of the smugglers who were slain in the attack on their retreat last night, and I was aided in my victory by the boy that letter condemns, that son of the lady whom that letter shamefully and maliciously slanders."

"Now, sir, you have my proof, for I speak from what I know," and Archer Dean sat waiting the reply of the thoroughly amazed commandant, who was speechless at what he heard.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE SPITFIRE GOES PIRATE-HUNTING.

COMMANDANT CLEMMONS knew that Archer Dean was not a man to quarrel with.

He stood too high in the estimation of the Government to seek to fight against him.

The anonymous letter received had fairly turned the head of the commandant, who saw a bold stroke for himself, and promotion, with riches from prize-money, by unearthing the nest of a woman pirate.

He had dreamed over the letter and felt that it would reap a world of benefit by sending Captain Dean to seize the place, while he got the credit of unearthing the secret.

But the almost angry denunciation of the plan by Archer Dean fairly startled the commandant.

He saw that he could not fight the facts, the personal knowledge of Captain Dean against the secret communication of an unknown informer.

He also had to combat the fact that the very lad and his yacht, accused of carrying pirate plunder and smuggled goods, had been the means of attacking successfully the smugglers' retreat.

Feeling that he must go back from his position, he made one last parting blow by saying:

"But the letter, sir, the letter."

"Was prompted by malice, or revenge, and simply amounts to nothing."

"Only a coward will strike a man in the dark, and this one deals a blow at a woman and hides under the name of 'Unknown.'"

"Well, I hardly know what to think."

"If you will think, Commandant Clemmons, you will recall that I have just made my report to you from personal knowledge of facts."

"Am I to understand, sir, that you weigh that letter from an unknown against my report?"

There was an angry flash in the naval officer which showed that he would not have his word cast a slur upon.

So the commandant said quickly:

"By no means, Captain Dean, for I accept your report as it is, and shall take no steps in this matter without consulting you."

"You are extremely wise, sir, in this resolve, for you will discover, upon reading over your official status that you have not an atom of authority beyond the jurisdiction of this seaport and its immediate harbor."

"But, sir, I—"

"Read your instructions, sir; as you appear not to have done so, and you will discover that the jurisdiction beyond this seaport, along the coast line of the Gulf and its

waters, on the soil of the United States, belongs to the naval officers commanding vessels on these stations, except in so far as ports are concerned which have a commandant."

"Now let me urge you to not interfere in my duty, and all will be well."

"May I ask, sir, if you now are ready to receive my report of the attack on and capture of the buccaneer smugglers, aided by a young lad and his negro crew, the lad in question being a dweller at Red Cliffs and bearing the name of Reginald Revello?"

"Yes, sir, I am ready to receive the report," was the surly answer of the commandant, for he was deeply chagrined at the manner in which his plot had miscarried and the resentful tone of Captain Dean.

"I make this report, sir, according to orders, to you as commandant of the port of Mobile, and turn over to you to hold for orders from Washington, the prisoners, booty and prize vessels captured."

"My own report, sir, to the Government, I also leave for you, to transmit with my report to you."

The commandant looked over the reports in a sullen sort of way, for he was completely crushed at his set-back, for his visions of promotion, riches and fame had faded away like "the baseless fabric of a dream."

When he left the quarters of the port commandant, Archer Dean was in a very angry mood.

The accusation against Lucille Revello and her son had made him indignant in the extreme, and he said to himself:

"Had I not been in port that fool, on the strength of that nameless letter would surely have sent a force over there, and done a world of damage."

"But I shall see to it that the commandant of the next cruiser that comes into port knows the situation as it is, and will not be led astray by any report the port commandant may make to him."

Going on board ship he wrote a letter to the "Captains of the Cruisers Visiting Port," and left it in the hand of an officer ashore to see it delivered promptly, after which he felt relieved.

His return to his vessel was greeted with every demonstration of delight by his officers and men, showing his popularity with them as a commander and shipmate.

Determined to lose no time in going in the wake of the Moorish schooner, Captain Dean at once began the overhauling of his vessel and the getting of stores on board.

After a busy week's work the Spitfire was ready for sea, and sailed one night out of the harbor ready to face any foe she might meet in the shape of an outlaw vessel.

The Spitfire was certainly a beautiful craft, and a fleet sailer, while her armament was heavy for her tonnage and all that her captain and crew could desire.

She was also thoroughly manned, and the men had the same confidence in their commander that he held in them.

As the beacon on the tower of Red Cliffs cast its rays over the waters, Archer Dean gave a sigh and muttered to himself:

"Now to keep my pledge and win my reward, a reward worthy any man to strive for."

CHAPTER LVII.

THE MOOR'S ARRIVAL.

It is now time to follow the fortunes of the pretended Moorish vessel, after her Red-skin commander sailed away from Red Cliffs.

He was in a mood to do any deed of desperation, and as the schooner sailed down the bay, he noted the gathering of the clouds that betokened a storm with real delight.

A storm, blow it ever so fiercely, would chime in with his humor just then.

As the schooner sped on, suddenly came the voice of the lookout from aloft.

It was one of the original crew of the lugger, for Belt Despard always kept his negro sailors on duty when there was any importance attached to the work.

"Boat, ho!" sung out the man aloft.

"Ay, ay, what is it?"

"A boat, sah, crossin' our course and headin' due east, sah."

"Ay, ay, I see her now."

And Belt Despard had his glass now upon the boat.

"It is a large boat, like a man-of-war's barge, and filled with men."

"As she is now going we will about meet in our course," he said.

So on the schooner flew, the wind now beginning to blow savagely, and it soon became evident that she would cross very close to the barge.

As she drew nearer it was seen that the barge slackened her pace, then there came a hail, all of which was unheeded on the vessel.

The helmsman glanced toward Captain Despard, expecting orders to luff or fall off a few points and clear the boat.

But none came, and the schooner held straight on.

"We will run her down, Sea Chief," said Kaloo, who stood near.

"That is just what I intend to do."

"They are cruisers, men, as a blind man can see, and hence they are now our foes."

"Steady as you are, there at the wheel!"

The order was obeyed, and then springing into the shrouds, Despard called out quickly, but in a low tone:

"At the helm, there!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Luff!"

"Luff it is, sah."

"Steady."

"Steady 'tis, sah."

"Let her fall off a couple of points—there! steady as you are—luff sharp!"

"We have her!"

These orders were given rapidly, to suit the movements of the barge, striving to escape the doom the schooner intended for her.

But with the last words uttered by Despard came a shock, a terrific crash, and the sharp bow of the schooner had cut the boat in two and hurled the crew into the sea.

Then from the lips of Despard came a burst of mocking laughter as the schooner drove on, leaving the men to their fate.

Out of the bay he went, when prudence would have suggested his anchoring in the cove until the tempest was over.

But he was in a desperate mood, and right into the teeth of the tempest he rushed his vessel, unheeding the dread of the cable, savage crew, who never before had seen the sea so wild.

But with all his desperation the Red-skin Rover had a thorough care over his ship, and stripped her of all canvas, housed her topmasts, lashed everything securely and then let her take the storm as it found her.

At last he was forced to lie to, and thus rode out the hours of the night.

But with the cessation of the storm he put her on her course for Havana.

Pacing the deck through the night he had had time to think, and it came to him that as he had determined to play the Moor he would first do so, ere turning his hand to piracy.

He had a large sum of money awaiting his demand in the hands of Fuentes, the landlord, in Havana, and there was Don Sebastian Rivas ready to welcome him as a friend and introduce him into the charmed circle of Cuban society.

He felt a delight in the thought that he could deceive them all, mingle as the equal of proud and rich nobles and aristocrats, discover what would be of use to him in his future career as a buccaneer and then startle and horrify all by raising the black flag.

So to Havana he decided to go and the schooner's course was laid for that port.

It was a bright, balmy afternoon when his vessel answered the signals from the Moro Castle and glided on into the harbor, filled with vessels from every port of the world.

There were vessels-of-war there, Spanish, English and American, and the officers and crews gazed with curious interest at the beautiful craft as she went by to an anchorage.

Her rig, though that of a schooner, had its peculiarities, changes which Despard had put on of a Moorish character in spars, sails and rig.

She had but a small battery, and with her black, savage-looking crew could not but attract attention.

Then at her peak floated the flag of Morocco, while the Spanish cruiser waved from the fore and at the head of the mainmast was what was supposed to be private colors of her commander.

This was a red field in which was a golden cimeter.

Reaching a harborage she let fall her anchors and as nimbly as men-of-war's-men the black crew stripped their vessel of canvas and soon had all in readiness for a considerable stay in port.

A shore boat was hailed and the oarsman departed for the shore bearing a letter for Don Sebastian Rivas.

In less than an hour a barge came off bearing the Don, and he was met at the gangway by Kaloo and conducted at once to the cabin of the schooner, where Belt Despard was awaiting him, smoking the while a Turkish pipe, and with a decanter of wine at his elbow on the table.

CHAPTER LVIII.

A PAIR OF SCHEMERS.

"Ah, my dear captain, I am more than charmed to greet you, and to welcome you to our glorious city of Havana."

Such was the greeting of Don Sebastian Rivas as he entered the schooner's cabin and beheld its commander seated there.

The Red-skin Rover glanced over the shoulder of the Spaniard, saw that he was not accompanied by any one, and so said abruptly:

"Yes, your dear friend Rais Selim Ben Alvah the Moor, is here, and returns your greeting."

"You are behind your time assigned for your coming, though, senor."

"Yes, somewhat; but I had business that detained me."

"Surely you have not touched at any port before coming here?"

"At no port, no; but I have been cruising a little."

"Doubtless, for it is a long voyage here from Morocco."

"So it is; but what have you done?"

"Earned my money."

"I do not doubt that; but in what manner?"

"Well, I gave out that the Rais Ben Alvah was to visit Havana."

"I see."

"The women were wild to see you, and the men are envious."

"Why?"

"Well, I reported you as being enormously rich, a noble, and cruising the world over in your own armed vessel, and men like no one else who can surpass them in idleness, the possession of gold and enjoyment."

"I am here for a good time, Don Sebastian."

"You shall have it."

"I desire to meet the governor-general."

"It is all arranged."

"And the best people in Havana?"

"They will be only too happy."

"Of course you will invite me to your villa on the coast?"

"That is settled upon."

"And I will buy it, inviting you to be my guest."

"Certainly, senor."

"Now where is Fuentes?"

"At his inn."

"I will see him as Fuentes, and also in the characters he plays."

"Yes, senor, if you wish."

"You said nothing to him about who this Moor was?"

"Not a word."

"When shall we meet him?"

"In which of his characters?"

"As Don Jose Huascar, the Peruvian."

"To-morrow night at the governor-general's, for there is to be a reception there and I will take you with me."

"That is well; but now I must secure horses and carriages to be held at my service, and rooms ashore to be held at my pleasure, for I intend to go it strong here, Don Sebastian."

"So much the better, only be careful."

"Of what?"

"Detection."

"Bah! no one could detect me, and you and Fuentes alone will know the secret of who I am."

"When I have run my course I will depart and seek some other amusement."

"You are your own master, senor."

"And intend to so remain."

"But tell me if you need money?"

"Always, sir."

"Here is a second payment of the sum I promised you."

"Thanks, oh thanks!"

"When I am received in society here I will pay you the balance."

"That will do, senor."

"Now go ashore and engage my rooms, horses and carriages, and also servants, except a valet, for I will bring my own man with me."

"When will you land, senor?"

"To-morrow."

"All shall be in readiness for you, senor, and I will come off in the morning to accompany you ashore."

"Do so."

The Don now took his departure, and hardly had he gone when Despard ordered a shore boat to be called.

When it came alongside he left his cabin, but no longer attired as a Moor, but in a sailor suit, his real character of Belt Despard.

The boatman rowed him to a point he designated, and as it was now night he landed, bade the man await his return, and set off for the inn of Fuentes.

He entered quietly and stood at the bar before Fuentes, ere that worthy caught sight of him.

The landlord started, but quickly recovered himself, left his saloon in charge of one of his waitresses and led his guest up-stairs to the room he had occupied when there before.

"Well, Senor Despard, this is a surprise," when the door closed behind him.

"Doubtless an unwelcome one, as I come for money."

"Well no, I expect to pay my debts; but I will not pay the sum you demand, as disease carried off half of those people you brought over last."

"I am not in partnership with Death, Senor Fuentes, and those people were delivered in good condition to you and I have an order on you, signed by your agent, Don Sebastian Rivas, for the sum total of the value of the slaves delivered to him."

"Why did you not present your order sooner?"

"That is my business, and it was to your advantage certainly that I did not, as you have had the use of the money all this time."

"Well, I shall not pay for dead cattle."

"How do you know they died, as you say?"

"I know it, and that is enough."

"See here, Fuentes, I am not a man that you can cheat."

"You sold those slaves before they were five hours in your agent's hands, and got the money for them."

"You made a clean fifty thousand by the operation and I have just this to say to you, that unless you pay me the amount of money named in my written demand on you, I shall drive you out of Havana; nay more, it will be by a road that will lead you straight to the *garrote*, or to a dungeon in Moro Castle."

"Now what have you to say?" and the Red-skin Rover smiled as blandly as though he had nothing to ruffle his temper.

CHAPTER LIX.

SENOR FUENTES AT BAY.

"Well, senor, you take a very bold stand, when you threaten me," said Fuentes, when he heard the threat of Belt Despard.

"I mean it."

"You do not seem to understand where you are."

"Yes, I do."

"You are in Havana."

"I am aware of that fact."

"You do not understand who you are."

"Oh yes."

"You are a half-breed Indian."

"Yes."

"One who was one of Ricardo's officers!"

"True."

"Ricardo was a pirate."

"Yes."

"All of his men are condemned to death, you may not know?"

"Oh, yes, I am under sentence of death myself."

"And then you do not seem to know who I am."

"I do."

"Who, for instance?"

"You are Fuentes, an innkeeper."

"Yes."

"And a receiver and disposer of piratical booty."

"Who says so?"

"I do."

"How can you prove it?"

"By making the charge and having your den searched."

Fuentes laughed, and then said:

"My dear Senor Despard, you can prove nothing, for a pirate's word is of no value."

"Besides, as a pirate under sentence of death, you dare not appear against me."

"I will do so."

"Granted that you do, what then?"

"It will cause your den to be searched."

"There is just where I am too smart for you."

"How so?"

"Well, I have not one atom of booty here, and never have kept any here."

"I do not believe you."

"The search will reveal the truth of what I say."

"A search it shall be, then, unless you pay me my money."

Again Fuentes laughed, and this maddened the Indian captain, for he said savagely:

"See here, you do not know my nature, Fuentes, to attempt to play with me, for I would sell my heart, soul and body to Satan, die any death, suffer any punishment, but what I was avenged upon you."

Fuentes saw that he had gone too far, so said:

"I do not refuse to pay you money."

"You refuse my first demand upon you."

"I will pay half the sum."

"No, I wish all, or none."

"Then get it."

"I will do so."

"How?"

"Well, I will go to the governor-general, tell him that I was a pirate, offer evidence to convict you and others, provided I am given a pardon, and my word for it you will have to go."

"Where?"

"To the Moro, or the *garrote*."

"The governor-general would laugh at you."

"Would he?"

"Why, yes."

"He will not."

"Granted that he does not?"

"You will be arrested."

"By whom?"

"His command."

"Who will arrest me?"

"His officers."

"Senor Despard you are a fool."

"What?"

"You are a fool."

"Have a care."

"Why I have got half the governor's officers in my pay."

"It is false."

"You say so."

"I know so."

"Prove it."

"I will, if you care to have me do so."

"I do care."

"Well, there is a closet, so be ready to enter it when you hear a step approaching the door."

"I will send for any one you may suggest who is in high favor with the governor-general."

"I know of no one for you to call upon."

"Well, I will name several of his officers, his adjutant, aides and *attaches*, and you can select any one, or two seamen at random."

"Do so."

Fuentes named over a number of officers and at last Belt Despard selected that of Captain Miguel Delsol.

The landlord simply rung a bell and a Cuban servant appeared.

"Present my compliments to Captain Miguel Delsol at the Palacio and say that I desire to see him at once."

"Yes, senor."

The servant disappeared and Belt Despard said with a sneer:

"You think he will come?"

"I know that he will."
 "We shall see."
 "Well, if you care to ask for another to come do so, even of much higher rank than is Captain Delsol."
 "He will do for the present if he comes."
 "Well, you shall soon see; but in the mean time we can drink a decanter of wine together."
 "Send for it, then, do not go for it."
 "I see that you are suspicious of me?"
 "I am."
 "Then I will send for the wine."
 The bell again brought a servant, and wine and glasses were ordered.
 The Indian took the waiting with the equanimity and patience of his race, seeming not in the least disturbed.
 Senor Fuentes showed some annoyance, and grew impatient as the time passed and the servant did not return.
 At last as Despard began to sneer at the servant's non-arrival there came a step without and the man entered.
 "Well?"
 "The Senor Captain Delsol was not at the Palacio, but at a dinner given in his honor, so I went there for him."
 "He will be here?"
 "Yes, senor, he said that he would quickly follow me, though he seemed angry at being called away."
 "Very well, await his coming and bring him here."
 "Yes, senor."
 "Say that I am alone."
 "Yes, senor," and the servant disappeared.

CHAPTER LX.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

BELT DESPARD was surprised at the report brought by the servant, that Captain Delsol, had obeyed the bidding of a common Spanish saloon-keeper and would do as he had requested.
 He, however, did not show his surprise.
 "I told you he would come, senor."
 "He is not here yet."
 "But he will be."
 "We shall see."
 "He left an entertainment given in his honor, and will obey."
 "I will believe it when I see him."
 "Ah! I hear steps, so hide yonder in the closet, for you can overhear all that is said."
 "The Indian quickly stepped into the closet, while Fuentes sat at the table.
 Then came steps without, a knock and the servant threw open the door and ushered into the room a tall, handsome young Spanish officer with his cloak thrown about his shoulders.
 "Well, Senor Captain, I am glad you have come."
 "Get more wine and glasses here," called out the landlord to the servant.
 "Yes, I come, for you know full well I would not disregard your bidding, Fuentes; but, *caramba!* why could you not send for me at another time, for this is my natal night and I was making jolly at the house of the lady I am to wed."
 "Come, out with your business with me and let me be off," and the officer threw himself into the chair just vacated by Despard.
 "I did not know, or care, Senor Captain, what your pleasures were, for I wanted you on a special service."
 "Well?"
 "There is in port an Indian captain whom I wish you to hunt down and have thrown into the Moro before morning, or as soon thereafter as you can."
 "How he came I do not know, perhaps in a fishing-smack, perhaps in an American schooner."
 "But he is a pirate, and if you do as I order you, then you will get a prize, that is all."
 "Describe him."
 "He is an American Indian, with white and black blood also in his veins."
 "He is from the port of New Orleans, and possesses a fine form, handsome face, and has very courtly manners."
 "You will find him in the garb of a sailor, and he does not know that any one is upon his track, so put your Spanish bloodhounds of the law at once upon his trail."

"As soon as I can go to El Moro I will do so."
 "See to it that there is no mistake, and bring the man here first for me to recognize."
 "Now a glass of wine with you."
 "I am willing," and the officer dashed off the wine while he asked:
 "Is it so important for me to do this work to-night?"
 "I will delay until sunrise if you desire it so much."
 "I do, for I told you that I wished to return to my friends."
 "Do so; but is Colonel Velasquez, your friend, with you there to-night?"
 "He is."
 "You know that he owes me largely, so hint to him that unless he pays me soon I shall break him of his commission."
 "I'll do so, though the poor fellow is in bad luck, so don't be hard upon him, Fuentes."
 "At sunrise I will be on the track of your Indian, never fear."
 With this the young officer departed from the room.
 As the door slammed behind him Fuentes called out:
 "Resume your seat and wine, Senor Captain Belt Despard."
 The Indian did so, sullenly.
 "Well, you saw?"
 "No."
 "What?"
 "I heard."
 "You are convinced?"
 "Yes, I feel that you have the power you claim."
 "You heard the threat I made regarding his friend the colonel?"
 "I did."
 "It shows you that they fear me."
 "It looks so."
 "I told you they were in my pay, so you see you can do me no harm."
 "I can at least try."
 "You heard what I told him to do?"
 "Yes."
 "Hunt down an Indian sea-captain?"
 "I heard."
 "He'll do it."
 "Are you sure?"
 "Perfectly."
 "I doubt it."
 "Well, all I can say to you, Belt Despard, is to take the money I offer you and get out of Havana this very night."
 "Suppose I do not care to do so?"
 "You will go surely into the dungeons of El Moro."
 "I doubt it."
 "You will then be garroted, if I say so."
 "No."
 "Once in that man's power and my word is law."
 "Well, I'll take my chances."
 "You are a fool."
 "And I'll take my money."
 "I have here what I will give you."
 "All or none."
 "I will pay you just fifty thousand pesos."
 "I refuse to accept the amount."
 "Then you go forth from here to your doom."
 "We shall see."
 "I have warned you, and as you heed not your fate be upon your own head."
 "I accept the responsibility, and more, I shall now tell you that to-morrow you will appear before an officer of the Government."
 "Perhaps I may," and Fuentes laughed.
 "And I will be there too, and I will give you one more chance to pay me, and if you refuse, then your doom is sealed."
 "I will accept any doom you can bring upon me."
 "So be it," and with this the Indian captain arose and left the room, unheeding the call of Fuentes to return, for he did not like the look on Despard's face, fearless as he was of consequences to himself.

CHAPTER LXI.

DESPARD'S DEMAND.

WHEN he left the inn of Fuentes, Despard sprang into a *volante*, and drove to the place where he had left his boat.
 Then he wrote a few lines on a card, gave it to the *volante* driver, and bade him drive to the house of Don Sebastian Rivas.

Going on board of his vessel, he at once called his valet, Algah, and made a very elaborate and gorgeous toilet, remarking to himself as he did so:
 "It would hardly be safe for Despard, the Indian captain, to be seen in Havana just now, but Rais Selim Ben Alvah will have no trouble."
 Just then Don Sebastian arrived on board, and Despard said:
 "I sent for you, my dear Don, to have you take me to the Palais to night, and present me to the governor-general."
 "I guess it will be possible, senor, though it is sudden."
 "It must be possible, Don Sebastian."
 "I am a Moor, you know, and it is the custom of my country, upon entering port, to bear at once to the ruler a valuable gift, with good wishes."
 "That gift I have here in the shape of a superb, gem-hilted Moorish blade, and I desire to present it to the governor-general."
 "This ceremony is always done, and when you have presented me you must retire and wait without, after hinting to the governor that it is a custom of the Moors."
 "I'll do as you wish, senor."
 "You must, for it will be money in your pocket."
 "I am ready."
 "You have spoken to the governor-general of my coming?"
 "Yes, senor, often."
 "Then it will not be a surprise to him?"
 "None at all."
 "I, too, am ready."
 "You are looking splendidly, every inch a Moor."
 "Thanks," and after a glass of wine together the two left the schooner and were rowed ashore, accompanied by Algah, having the gift for the governor wrapped in a cloth of silver.
 The *volante* was waiting at the landing, and entering it they were driven with all haste to the Palacio.
 Don Sebastian's rank at once gained them admission, and the governor received them most cordially, warmly grasping the hand of the supposed Moor, and addressing him in French, until Despard said:
 "I speak Spanish, excellenza."
 After a few words of conversation the Don withdrew and the pretended Moor beckoned to Algah to approach.
 Taking the sword he presented it to the governor-general with a polite little speech, to which his Excellenza made an appropriate response and was loud in his praise of the beautiful gift, for beautiful it indeed was.
 After a short while the Indian said:
 "Now, excellenza, I have a request to make of you, and that is, a permit from you to make an arrest."
 "It is of a man whom I have every reason to believe was a Spanish pirate; but I have on board of my vessel men who know him well, and if he proves to be the one I seek, then I will see that he is properly punished."
 "Should he not be the man, then he shall go free and no harm will be done."
 "You shall at once have the order, Rais Selim Ben Alvah," said the governor-general, and calling an officer he bade him write out an order to furnish the Moor with a guard which should be wholly subject to his command.
 The Moor told the governor-general's aide where to have the guard report, and then, as Don Sebastian approached, they took their leave, the stranger promising to attend the reception at the Palacio the following evening.
 "The governor was delighted with you, senor," said the Don, as he left Despard at the *volante*.
 "I am glad to know it."
 "Now, good-night, and come aboard in the morning."
 "I will be there," was the reply.
 Waiting at the landing for the guard it soon came, and Despard gave the officer some quiet instructions, and then went on board his vessel.
 An hour after a boat was hailed, and in it was found the guard and a prisoner.
 They came alongside and the prisoner was delivered up to the crew of the schooner and taken to the cabin.
 There sat the Indian captain, dressed in his

sailor garb, and as the prisoner entered he turned white with rage and fear.

"Well, Senor Fuentes, we meet again, and before Captain Delsol had a chance to get me into the Moro."

"*Caramba!* what does this mean?" cried the Spaniard savagely, and he tugged at the manacles upon his wrists.

"It only means that I reported you to the governor-general and got permission to have you arrested and brought here.

"Now what have you to say for yourself?"

"You have triumphed, so what do you wish?"

"I wish only to get my money."

"I have no money with me; but if you will permit me to return—"

"Oh no, I'll do nothing of the kind, for once ashore you could get me into trouble.

"Now you can send an order to your house for the amount you owe me."

"If I refuse?"

"Then, as I go to sea to-night, you will accompany me, and more, you will be hanged as soon as we have passed out of the harbor."

"I will pay you."

"Then sit there and write the order, for I will take it."

This the man did, and he was put under guard until the return of the Indian captain.

It was very late when he got back; but he had the gold in full, paid by the wife of Fuentes, and then the unhappy landlord was put ashore, and hastened to his home as fast as his legs could carry him.

CHAPTER LXII.

AT THE PALACIO.

To deceive Landlord Fuentes, the cabin of the schooner had been stripped of its elegance and did not look like the sea home of a Moorish noble.

Then the crew had been taken out of their fine uniforms, and in the night as it was, Fuentes came to the conclusion that Belt Despard had dared run into port in his own schooner, the slave-ship.

Of course he did not believe for a moment after having treated him as he had, that he would dare remain in port.

Preparations, or a show of them, were being made on board when Fuentes was there, to indicate that the schooner was going at once to sea, the moment the landlord was put ashore.

When at the Palacio it had been suggested by the governor-general that Rais Selim Ben Alvah should move his schooner to a more desirable anchorage further up the harbor, and so it was that the vessel was gotten under weigh almost before Fuentes left her deck.

Running up to the appointed anchorage Despard let fall his anchors and put his craft in shipshape once more as a pretended Moorish vessel, so that when in the morning the angry Fuentes hastened to overlook the harbor he did not observe the craft he still hoped had remained, for then would have come the opportunity for his revenge.

He beheld the schooner at her new anchorage, as he made his search, and for a moment believed he had found her.

But when asked, a Spanish guard had said:

"That is the Moorish vessel that came in last night, her captain being a friend of the governor-general."

So Fuentes returned to his home with no suspicion of the truth.

Arriving there he gave out that he was going out of the city for a few days, and in disguise sought the quarters in town where he was known as Don Jose Huascar, the Peruvian millionaire and friend of Don Sebastian Rivas.

With the changes made in his beard and costume, no one would suspect Don Jose Huascar, the Peruvian, of being the low saloon-keeper Fuentes.

He had been well born, and could play the gentleman when he so pleased.

Then too he was wearing a disguise as Fuentes, for reasons best known to himself, having what appeared to be a hunchback and a lame leg, while he wore a shaggy wig, and his beard always appeared to be of about a week's growth.

Thus it was when Don Jose Huascar was announced at the reception of the governor-general he was received with distinguished consideration by all present.

As he approached to pay his respects to the governor-general he saw standing by his side a man in most gorgeous attire.

He possessed a tall form, dignified air and was robed like a prince, his dress being that of a Moor and blazing with gems.

As he turned the governor-general said:

"My dear Don Jose Huascar, allow me to present you to my Moorish friend the Senor Rais Selim Ben Alvah, who has visited our port to remain for some time.

"I trust you will be friends."

Fuentes bowed low but with a start as he met the glance bestowed upon him and thought he recognized the smile of his foe, Belt Despard the Indian captain.

"I shall be most happy to be the friend of Don Jose Huascar," said the pretended Moor, and he offered his arm which Fuentes reluctantly took as the governor-general turned to other guests.

"Ah, there is our mutual friend Don Sebastian Rivas, suppose we join him," said Despard in Spanish.

"You know Don Sebastian also then, senor?" said Fuentes, assured and yet in doubt that he was talking to Belt Despard.

"Ah yes, senor—oh! Don Sebastian, you meet two of your old friends."

"Yes, and I am glad to see that you have recognized each other and are friends, for I dared not tell you, Don Jose, that I had also introduced our red captain into society here; but then it pays me, you know, and I always want gold."

"*Caramba!* but I shall expose you, Belt Despard," hissed Fuentes.

"Do so, and the mask of Don Jose Huascar of Peru is removed and the face of Fuentes the ex-pirate is revealed," was the smiling reply of Despard.

"You have been the victor for a second time, Despard, and I must admit that you have proven my master."

"I only asked what was my own, and you sought to defraud me of it, for I had already heard that none of the people, with several exceptions, had died."

"Now we are quits, and as you acknowledge me master I am content to help you, as it will now be in my power to do so."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean, that after I have enjoyed the busy whirl of Havana society for a while, say half a year or so, I shall carry out the vent of my inclination and turn pirate."

"Better marry some heiress and remain here."

"Don't speak to me of wedding any woman, Fuentes," was the savage retort of the Indian.

"Oh, I see, you have been hit."

"Yes, and cruelly."

"For that reason I seek revenge, and when I turn pirate you can be my agent here, for I do not fear you."

"Ah, no, I like you for the clever villain that you are, only do not seek to match cunning with one who has Indian, African and negro blood in his veins."

"But, come, let us not attract attention to our long discourse, but present me to some of your friends, for you know Rais Selim Ben Alvah, the Moor, is not known here in Havana as the wealthy Don Jose Huascar the Peruvian."

Just then Don Sebastian returned and the trio of villains were soon the lions of the governor's reception.

CHAPTER LXIII.

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR.

FROM the "lion" of the governor-general's reception, where he made his debut into the select society of Havana, Rais Selim Ben Alvah became the acknowledged favorite of the town.

Don Jose the Peruvian was a lesser light in the glare of the Moor's superior magnificence, for the latter was a very handsome man and fascinating withal, while the former had only his supposed great wealth to recommend him.

The days passed on and the town was startled by hearing that Rais Ben Alvah had purchased for a large sum in cash the coast villa, its slaves and all, a place which only

the greatest wealth could keep up, and which the Don could not afford to keep.

That Don Sebastian was broken in fortune was a secret which he had religiously managed to keep from the public.

There were cruises on the Moor's vessel, and there were always charming parties along, the governor-general going on several occasions.

Of course, Don Sebastian and Don Jose never missed going with their dear friend "the Moor."

The black, savage crew of the Moor were a great object of interest to the Havaneese, and many a young girl longed to win the dark-faced stranger to land it over her fellows by capturing the prize.

As the seas were dangerous in those days, on account of pirates, Don Jose urged Rais Ben Alvah to arm his yacht more heavily, and at last permission was asked to do so of the governor-general.

Not only was permission granted, but the governor-general informed Rais Selim Ben Alvah just where he could secure a splendid battery from a cruiser which had run on a reef and would be of no further use.

There was a lugger sent for the guns, and Rais Selim Ben Alvah was more than pleased with his purchase, which he paid cash for upon their delivery on board.

After having his vessel put in perfect trim in port, and her new battery mounted, Rais Ben Alvah decided that he would sail for his villa on the coast, where he was to pass a couple of months in resting after his dissipation in the gay society of Havana.

So it was that the schooner set sail one afternoon, and headed for the harbor near the villa purchased from Don Sebastian.

For awhile society was disconsolate at the loss of its favorite, but gradually, even Rais Selim Ben Alvah was dropped out of mind until after several months he was almost forgotten, excepting by a few who had shared his hospitalities, and looked forward to doing the same when the gay season opened again.

Don Sebastian having spent all his money had retired to his distant home on the Southern coast, where he again acted as the agent for Fuentes, for slaves brought over from the African coast.

As for Don Jose Huascar, it was said that he had sailed for Peru, to return again at an early day, and so it was that Fuentes came to haunt his old familiar scenes once more.

One day Rais Selim Ben Alvah was seated upon his piazza smoking, and watching the coming into the harbor of a small sloop.

He had tired at last of life in Havana, had tired of the rest at his villa, and as his funds began to run low had decided to start upon the work which had ever been uppermost in his mind since he had made his awful threat to Lucille Revello when she refused his love.

Six months and more had passed since then and he had not struck a single blow as a buccaneer.

But he had made himself acquainted most thoroughly with the sea-going vessels out of and into Havana, the cargoes they carried and their value.

He had noted and marked all the vessels carrying gold, and taking advantage of his warm friendship with officials had learned all that was necessary for him to do the greatest amount of damage, and secure the greatest amount of riches when he should set sail in the Destroyer as a buccaneer craft.

He had made up his mind to seek revenge upon Lucille Revello by kidnapping her boy, and then force her to become his wife or see her son put to death.

And now, a few days before his intended departure from his home, he sat there gazing out upon the sea, and watching the running in of the little sloop.

There in the harbor lay his beautiful vessel, all ready to fly to sea at a moment's notice, for her black crew were encamped upon the land a cable's length away.

Nearer and nearer came the little vessel until it ran alongside of the pier and was made fast.

A youth sprung out and he was dressed in the uniform of an American midshipman.

Up the stone steps he came to the broad avenue leading to the mansion.

The Red-skin Captain gazed at him with surprise.

What did an American officer want there and coming too in a small sloop?

Nearer came the youth, dark-faced, handsome but with a determined, set face and flashing eyes.

The Indian arose as he advanced and said:

"May I ask whom I have the honor of greeting as my guest?"

"You are Rais Selim Ben Alvah, I believe?"

"I am, sir."

"I am Laurita Paz," was the startling response.

CHAPTER LXIV.

A WOMAN'S THREAT.

HAD Belt Despard, the Indian rover, masquerading as a Moor, had to face a file of soldiers his face would not have changed color as it did, when from the lips of his unwelcome visitor came the words:

"I am Laurita Paz."

He turned deadly pale, started back, and was speechless, the young girl seeming to enjoy his alarm and confusion.

"Yes, I am Laurita Paz, the maiden whose heart you won under false pretenses, and whom you deserted to masquerade as a Moor," she said, as he made no effort to speak.

But he had quickly gained his composure and now said with a sneer:

"And you are masquerading in the garb of a naval officer, you a woman?"

"True, and in this garb I found out how false you were, for I put a powder in your wine the day you last dined with us, and while you slept rigged out in this costume, which I had worn to a masquerade ball, and went on board your lugger."

"I found there that you had lied to me."

"I found that you had not been captured by pirates as you had said, and so I intended to crush you."

"I found that you had wooed and won me as an Indian, when you also were part negro."

"You took alarm at my visit and fled, and then I lost track of you."

"But I determined to follow you and face you."

"I went to Mobile Bay and saw the woman whom you carried to the home she had made for herself there."

"It was not necessary for me to ask her if she loved you, for she hated you, and from her I learned just who you were and whither gone."

"I also learned of your awful threat, and so I followed you here, you, Rais Selim Ben Alvah."

"I followed you to Havana, and there heard of how the brilliant, fascinating Moor had won hearts and turned heads."

"So I came to your villa here in a small craft I chartered in Havana."

"I came to tell you that Laurita Paz is not one to allow any man to break her heart, destroy her life and not strike back."

"I came to tell you, Belt Despard, the Red-skin, that I shall track you to your doom."

"You hear my threat, so I give you fair warning."

"I will heed it not as I please."

"You will heed it."

"You think so."

"I know it."

"How, may I ask?"

"Because you showed craven fear when I told you my name."

"I know not what fear is."

"Of a man, no, but of a woman, yes."

"I fear neither man, woman or the devil."

The maiden laughed derisively at this, and said:

"Well, I am not one to strike in the dark, to strike at your back."

"So I sought you to warn you that to avenge myself on you, you who destroyed my life, I will destroy you."

"I have money and I will track you to your doom."

"It may not be to-day, this year, or next; but it will come, mark my words, for my destiny will be to see you die, to drive you to your death."

"It is no idle threat, so mark well my words, Belt Despard, the half-breed."

Without another word the disguised woman turned upon her heel and strode away,

leaving the Indian captain looking after her in a dazed sort of way.

He saw the slender uniformed figure disappear over the cliffs, following the walk down to the shore.

Then he saw, after a lapse of a few minutes, the little sloop standing out of the harbor.

Away it went, out through the rocky arms of the bay and changing her course headed toward Havana.

"And I have let her go."

"Fool! fool, that I am, when she was right here within my power."

"By Heaven! I believe I am afraid of that woman."

"If not, why did I stand before her like a whipped cur?"

"I verily believe it is fear that she caused me to feel, or else why did I not capture her?"

"But why need I fear her, when a few days more will see me a lawless rover of the seas?"

"She thinks I am still going to masquerade as Rais Selim Ben Alvah, little dreaming what my intention is."

"She thinks I seek to wed some rich Spanish or Cuban beauty, little dreaming that I hate all women now."

"So it is that she threatens to ruin me."

"But what need I fear, I, Despard the Destroyer, who will yet tinge the seas as red as my own face with the blood of my fellow-beings."

"Ha! ha! ha! Despard the Destroyer knows no fear, shows no mercy, for his mission now is to kill," and the man's laugh grew more and more wild as he worked himself up into a fever of hate against his fellow-men.

CHAPTER LXV.

IN THE RED ROVER'S WAKE.

WHEN Captain Archer Dean sailed in the Spitfire in search of the Red-Skin Rover, he went by Key West, as was his wont, to see if any late orders had been sent out to him by vessels outward bound.

To his great chagrin he received orders to await in Key West the arrival of a clipper ship which would bring a special envoy to Rio Janeiro, whom he was at once to carry to his destination.

Some days after the vessel arrived bearing the American envoy, for whom provision was at once made on board the schooner.

Captain Dean dared not disobey his orders, and knowing that he had to sail at once with the envoy, though he wished him at the bottom of the sea.

There was no cruiser near which he could send after the Destroyer, and so he decided to place the facts before the envoy and get him to agree to run by Havana and allow him to hunt up the schooner of the Red-skin Rover and give him battle.

When he saw this particular diplomat he felt that he would never consent to his doing as he desired.

He was a small man with a naturally scared expression upon his face, nervous as an old maid, and one who would certainly never become a hero or consent to any one else doing so.

Political influence had gotten him the appointment along with large interests of his own in Rio, and hence he had been the man sent out by the Government.

But Archer Dean would not yield without a struggle, and so he told the diplomat the exact situation.

The envoy was appalled at the proposition, and he raised such a merry war at the thought of risking his valuable body in battle that Archer Dean beat a hasty retreat, and in the long run out yielded to him his own cabin while he bunked in the wardroom with his officers.

Arriving at Rio it was found that the schooner must await the envoy's pleasure to return and thus months passed away.

At last the form of the Spitfire was turned homeward bound, and every officer and man roundly cursed the envoy for their long delay.

The little diplomat tried to prevail upon Captain Dean to carry him all the way to Washington, but was told very emphatically that he would be landed at Key West and must go on from there by packet.

Six months and more had thus gone by be-

fore the schooner dropped anchor again in Key West.

But the moment the envoy was hustled ashore the Spitfire set sail for Mobile Bay.

It was night when she dropped anchor off Red Cliffs, but as lights were shining in the mansion, Captain Dean went ashore and found Lucille Revello watching the coming of his vessel from the piazza.

She greeted him most warmly, told him that Reginald was away on a run to New Orleans in his yacht, and then heard his story of his cruise and his anathemas of the envoy extraordinary whose presence the Spitfire had been cursed with, thus preventing the carrying out of his plan to hunt down the Red-skin Rover.

"I have something to tell you, Archer, and I am sure that you will find the Indian captain in Cuban waters, for Reginald saw a sailor from Havana not long since and he was telling of a beautiful vessel he had seen there and that it belonged to a rich Moor who was a great favorite there."

"To Havana I sail to-morrow, Lucille."

"And further I wish to tell you that a beautiful young girl came here in search of that man, Belt Despard."

"He had wrecked her life, and she believed that I had been the cause of it."

"But I told her all and she said that she would some day find him, and then she left me."

"Well, I will run over to Mobile to-night, Lucille, make a few repairs my vessel needs and sail for Cuban waters."

"I have heard of no piracies the man has been guilty of, Archer, as yet."

"He is an outlaw, and cruises under false papers, with no right to the flag he floats, so I will capture him," was the determined reply of the officer.

An hour after he was on his way to Mobile, where he remained with his vessel for a week.

Then the beautiful craft set sail, once more laying her course for Havana, but this time giving Key West a wide berth as he feared he might chance upon another envoy there.

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE FULFILLMENT.

"WRECK ho!"

The cry came from aloft on the schooner-of-war Spitfire some days after her leaving the port of Mobile.

Far off over the waters was seen a dark object over which floated a flag.

As the schooner drew near it was discovered to be a dismayed vessel, lying very low in the water.

Upon the craft, which was a small one, being hardly more than thirty tons burden, were half a dozen persons.

The schooner luffed into the wind, a boat was sent to the wreck and the crew were taken on board, and just in time for their vessel was settling fast.

"There is an officer among them, sir," said a lieutenant to Archer Dean.

"Yes, a young fellow in midshipman's uniform," was the reply.

The crew were soon on board, a hardy lot of fellows excepting one who was in the dress of an American middy.

"Come into my cabin, sir, and let me aid you, while my men look after the others."

"This is an American cruiser," said the young officer when he followed Captain Dean into the cabin.

"It is."

"Thank Heaven for that, for I can put you on the track of a pirate."

"Say the word and we are ready."

"There is a man who has been posing as a Moor in Havana, and he has lately turned pirate, and made some valuable captures."

"He overhauled the little lugger in which I was a passenger from Havana, and boarding us, recognized me."

"Then he went back on his vessel and poured broadside after broadside into the craft, dismasting her and causing her to become a wreck."

"This was in the face of a coming storm, when he sailed away and left us, and I overheard him say:

"Now for my home on the coast of Cuba."

"That home I can pilot you to, sir."

"We weathered the storm, threw the slain of the crew into the sea, and but for your coming would have gone down in a few hours' more."

"You know this man?"

"I do, as Despard the Red-skin Rover."

"He is the man I am in search of, so tell me where to find him and your fortune is made."

"Gladly will I do so, for it is his destiny to go to his doom through me," was the reply.

Then the midshipman gave certain directions and under full sail the Spitfire went flying away for the Cuban coast.

The day was but breaking when the rescued midshipman took the wheel to run the schooner into a harbor on the coast.

But just then a vessel was sighted standing out under full sail.

"It is the Destroyer, the schooner of the Red-skin Rover," cried the midshipman.

At once the men were sent to quarters and all was made ready for a fight to the death.

The Destroyer's drums also beat to quarters and she accepted the challenge for a combat by answering a gun from the Spitfire.

Following these guns the roar of the batteries became incessant, and the two beautiful vessels drew nearer and nearer to each other.

Harder and harder the combat raged, the black crew of the Destroyer yelling like demons, and the men of the Spitfire cheering with every broadside.

It was give and take frightful wounds on both sides.

Large rents were made in the canvas of each vessel, and bulwarks and decks were splintered with the iron hail, while dead and wounded lay in heaps.

But still the battle raged, no quarter being asked, none being shown.

At last the two schooners were almost side by side, and the Spitfire meant to board, when a warning cry was heard.

It was the strange midshipman who shouted:

"The pirate is going down, sir, so steer clear of him!"

"It is true! port your helm there!" shouted Archer Dean, and the Spitfire swung off just as the buccaneer began to rock wildly.

Then a form sprang into the starboard main shrouds and all heard his words:

"Ho, Despard the Indian, I told you I would track you to your doom, for I brought this vessel here to fight you."

"Laurita Paz!" came from the lips of the Indian captain who was bleeding from a dozen wounds.

"Yes, Laurita Paz, who lives while you die!" As the words were uttered the sinking schooner gave a lurch, then her bows rose high in air to plunge beneath the waves the next instant, carrying her red captain and black crew, dead, dying and unharmed forever beneath the blue waters of the Gulf.

The boats of the schooner were lowered as quickly as it was possible, to pick up any of the men; but the black crew died with their ship, not one of them seeking to be rescued by their foes.

Then, badly damaged herself, the Spitfire was turned homeward, and some days after arrived in Mobile Bay, to report her victory.

That night the strange midshipman mysteriously disappeared, and Archer Dean said sadly:

"It was a woman in man's attire, and she was an avenger."

CHAPTER LXVII.

CONCLUSION.

WHEN Archer Dean got his wounded men ashore at Mobile, and there were many of them, and put his vessel upon the stocks for repairs sadly needed, he set out for the home across the bay to tell Lucille Revello that he had kept his pledge.

Then, too, he had been wounded and sadly "needed repairs," as he expressed it, and so sought a haven of rest where he knew he would meet with a warm welcome.

Nor was he disappointed, for he did indeed meet with a warm reception from both mother and son, and some weeks after the yacht sailed over to Mobile with two persons on board who were in search of a clergyman to make them man and wife.

Those two soon became one, and, as Reginald Revello got, through his new father, an appointment in the United States Navy as a midshipman, Archer Dean was content to rest upon the laurels he had won and resigning his commission to settle down and become the master of Red Cliffs Plantation, where, until his death he was honored as the one who had sunk the Destroyer, thus driving the Red-skin Rover from the seas.

THE END.

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